ISSUE #71:
JUST ADD WATER

ANOTHER CRAB'S
TREASURE

SPLATOON 3:
SIDE ORDER

**UFOURIA:
THE SAGA 2**

PAPER MARIO:
THE THOUSAND-YEAR DOOR

LUIGI'S MANSION
2 HD

ROLLIN' RASCAL

**PENNY'S BIG
BREAKAWAY**

**TEENAGE MUTANT
NINJA TURTLES:**
MUTANTS UNLEASHED

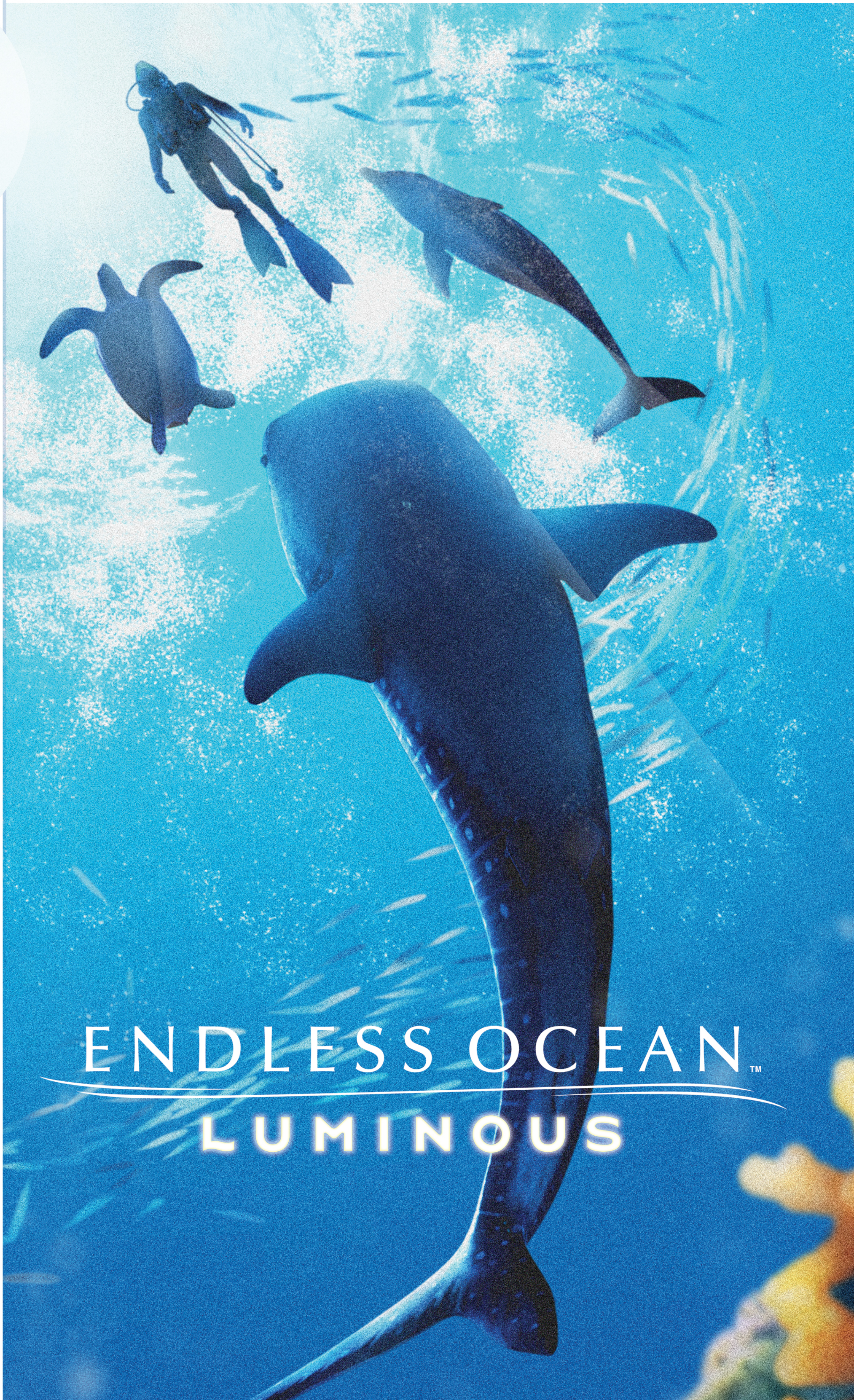
SHIREN THE WANDERER:
THE MYSTERY DUNGEON
OF SERPENTCOIL ISLAND

CONTRA:
OPERATION GALUGA

PRINCESS PEACH:
SHOWTIME!

OTOGI KATSUGEKI
**MAMEDA
NO BAKERU:**
ORACLE SAITAROU
NO SAINAN!!

**MAY/
JUNE 2024**



SPOTLIGHT ON THE YETEE

HOW'S YOUR WARDROBE holding up? If you're combing through your closet and come to find that your options for outfits are looking a little light, might I suggest surfing your way over to The Yetee to alleviate that issue? The Yetee is an online storefront specializing in shirts made especially to appeal to fans of anime, TV shows, pop culture in general and, of course, video games. Kind of like the sort of people who are probably reading this right now!

The Yetee also has an interesting hook that no other such shop echoes (as far as I know). Every day, they offer two brand-new T-shirt designs . . . that are only available to order during that same day! It's a 24-hour countdown every 24 hours, so you've got to move fast to place an order if a design pops up that really catches your eye. That could seem a little stressful, but it also means that brand-new options are appearing way more frequently than they do in other stores. It's a unique approach to shaking up the traditional T-shirt business!

Not everything at The Yetee is a time-limited offer, though. The shop also has a vast selection of other shirts that can be ordered at any time, as well as hats, posters, vinyl records, mugs and much, much more . . . like, say, books! Specifically one book in particular. NF's own The Impact of Iwata!

Yes, we've begun a partnership with The Yetee to offer the very first NF Book through their website as another place for people to place an order to own it. If you don't yet have your own copy of The Impact of Iwata and you happen to be shirt shopping at The Yetee anyway, why not add one to your order? (It's been selling really well there so far. It's sold out twice already and I've had to restock them again and again!)

It only makes sense for NF to link up with The Yetee, since we've had a representative of their site on our staff for years: John-Charles Holmes! He works at The Yetee as his primary job, and they kindly allow him enough break time to be able to illustrate new comics for each of our issues.

He's not the only NF staffer represented there, though! LLK, artist of the ongoing REST-0 comics, recently joined forces with The Yetee as well to sell a new plush toy of Velocity, the Games Done Quick mascot. (Also an LLK design!) Make sure to buy one of those in person at upcoming GDQ events – see John-Charles at The Yetee's booth! **— LUCAS**

TheYetee.com

ISSUE #71:
JUST ADD WATER

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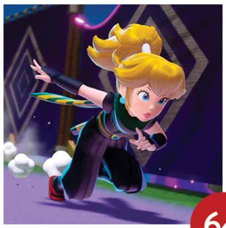
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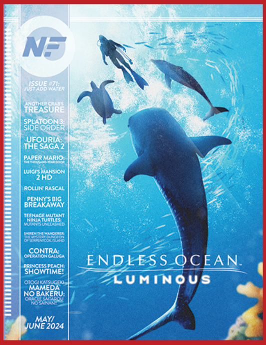


ON THE COVER

This decision might've shocked you since we've got the surefire smash hit Paper Mario: The Thousand-Year Door coming up in this same May/June two-month time period, but Paper Mario has made it onto the NF front cover a couple of times before, and likely will have further chances in the future. But would we ever have another opportunity to give the cover to the Endless Ocean franchise, if we didn't do so now? It's been nearly 15 years since this series last had a sequel! We might be waiting until 2039 for the next one!

78

INBOX

H 2 OH NO

I try not to worry about water.

In fact, thinking back across even my formative years as a Nintendo gamer, I remember actively seeking out water levels more than I do avoiding them. I have clear memories of honestly enjoying the swimming sections in Super Mario Bros., to the point where I'd avoid taking the Warp Zone in World 1-2 to skip to World 4 — because that would mean not getting to splash around in World 2-2. Bubble Man's stage was always a joy to jump into in Mega Man 2, because I loved the extra-high heights that you could leap to reach once you went under the water (even if the ceiling was lined with spikes). In Star Fox 64, I'd always try to choose the route that let me play the Aquas level, since it was the one and only place in that game where Fox would pilot the Blue-Marine submarine. Water worlds were always weird and different, and I liked experiencing each one!

But I fully understand that them being so weird and different is exactly why so many other players didn't want to even try to touch them. Swimming mechanics, submerged environments and definitely the whole reality of not being able to breathe freely (which some games carry over from real like) are all certainly valid reasons for avoiding these areas!

For this NF issue, we're trying to cast a wide net and look at all the different ways water in games can make us feel. Our central feature, Just Add Water, takes five different angles on the topic! Then we've got a preview of our cover game, Endless Ocean: Luminous, and an exclusive interview with the lead developer of the ocean floor Soulslike adventure, Another Crab's Treasure.

This whole issue is saturated with water-related titles beyond just those, too! See the skeletal fish foes of the new Splatoon 3 DLC, Side Order! Meet a penguin who doesn't know how to swim in Ufouria: The Saga 2! Get a second helping of development insight from Matthew Taranto when he discusses Tadpole Treble Encore. And much, much more!

Hopefully all this content will slake the mightiest of thirsts, leaving you feeling fully refreshed and ready to play some new games!

LUCAS M. THOMAS, EDITOR-IN-CHIEF

ISSUE #70: MARCH/APRIL 2024

Princess Peach stole the show when she stepped into the spotlight for our last edition, and it ended up becoming one of our most popular issues ever! Clearly the fans have been ready for Peach to restart her solo career for some time. We've got our review of Princess Peach: Showtime! ready for you later in this issue!

Our Player's Poll last time turned its attention, as always, to this issue's theme. We first asked if you've ever felt frightened (or maybe just frustrated?) by a water level in a video game. Next, in honor of Another Crab's Treasure, we wanted to know who your favorite crabs in gaming are! And lastly, we polled you all about your personal history with the Endless Ocean franchise. Since it's been inactive for so long, we wanted to get a sense of whether there's any real anticipation for Luminous. Let's see!

LETTERS

#1. Honestly, I've never been afraid of swimming in video games. Pretty much every underwater video game experience I've had has been passable (like Super Mario Bros. 3) or enjoyable (the underwater spy levels in Rayman Legends).

#2. The best crabs in a game are the Sidesteppers from Mario Bros. because (1.) Mario Bros. is an underappreciated game and (2.) they managed to survive in the sewers. You have to respect any animal that lives in these types of filthy, unhygienic conditions.

#3. I don't really have any experience with the Endless Ocean franchise, but I don't really have an interest in scuba diving games like these. Call me indifferent on this one. **— MICHAEL A. CICERELLI**

In terms of in-game swimming and whether I fear it or not, it really depends on the game. The Legend of Zelda: Skyward Sword and Donkey Kong Country: Tropical Freeze have plenty of generous air bubbles and control well, in my opinion. Games like Kirby's Epic Yarn with the Dolphin transformation and The Legend of Zelda: Majora's Mask with Zora Link control wonderfully in the water as well. I've never really liked the 2D Mario game swimming controls because of the feel of the physics in those games, so I dread those a little.

The best crab in gaming is Nipper from Banjo-Kazooie. I played and beat the game for the first time when it got released on Nintendo Switch Online + Expansion Pass and I remember getting to this guy as if it were yesterday. The fight wasn't the easiest and his pattern of attacks was a little tricky. I'm pretty sure I almost died!

I have not played the first two games in the Endless Ocean series, but I do plan on diving in and trying out Luminous. **— MATTHEW HORKEY**

Question 1: In the Mario games I fear swimming, because it's like I only have one place to go (especially in the old games).

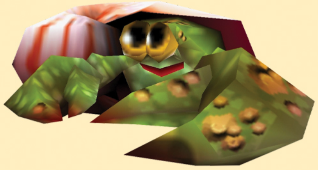
Question 2: I think Krabby's my favorite crab, since I like Pokémon.

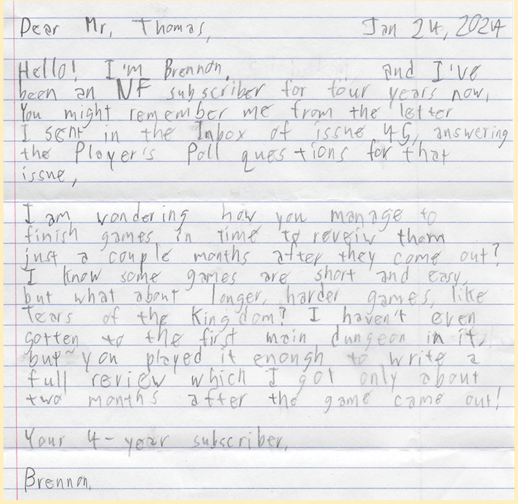
Question 3: I haven't played any of the Endless Ocean games but I might try one out if I win a Switch game! :) **— CHARLIE**

Hi NF! My name is Calvin and I am 7. My Dad reads your magazines and I read them too. Now let's get to the questions.

1. For games like Super Mario Bros., yes, because the levels are hard with Cheep Cheeps and Bloopers. For games like Super Mario Bros. Wonder, no.
2. I would probably choose Nipper from Banjo-Kazooie.
3. No, no — I don't even know what that is! **— CALVIN BABLITZ**

That's already two votes for Nipper! Way to go, Nipper!




Dear Mr. Thomas, Jan 24, 2024

Hello! I'm Brennon, and I've been an NF subscriber for four years now, You might remember me from the letter I sent in the Inbox of issue 45, answering the Player's Poll questions for that issue,

I am wondering how you manage to finish games in time to review them just a couple months after they come out? I know some games are short and easy, but what about longer, harder games, like Tears of the Kingdom? I haven't even gotten to the first main dungeon in it, but you played it enough to write a full review which I got only about two months after the game came out!

Your 4-year subscriber,

Brennon

FINDING THE TIME TO PLAY GAMES

Dear Mr. Thomas,

Hello! I'm Brennon, and I've been an NF subscriber for four years now. You might remember me from the letter I sent in the Inbox of Issue #45, answering the Player's Poll questions for that issue.

I am wondering how you manage to finish games in time to review them just a couple months after they come out? I know some games are short and easy, but what about longer, harder games, like Tears of the Kingdom? I haven't even gotten to the first main dungeon in it, but you played it enough to write a full review which I got only about two months after the game came out! **— YOUR 4-YEAR SUBSCRIBER, BRENNON**

Good question, Brennon! We actually take longer than most outlets to play games for review — lots of journalists working for websites or YouTube channels have to deal with crazy "crunch" time and totally blitz their way through games in order to meet a deadline that often comes before a game's released to the public! Our more relaxed publishing schedule helps us avoid that. But if you're still taken aback by even our timeline, I'll say that I personally double-up gameplay with Dad time, including my kids in the experience of playing big, long games like Tears of the Kingdom. That way I'm "working," sure, but also hanging out with them!

Hi! This is my first Player's Poll and I think water in games can be very fun or totally deadly. In Pikmin, almost all your Pikmin would drown, but in games like Bowser's Fury, the final battle is in the water!

My favorite crab is the Peckish Aristocrab from Pikmin 3 because he has one very powerful arm and a huge mouth for double the damage to my Pikmin squad 😭.

I never played Endless Ocean and to me it looked like Pokémon Snap but without Pokémon. I didn't like Snap much so I doubt I will play Endless Ocean.

P.S. I think Carter has saved Princess Peach around 30 times. **— YOUR 11-YEAR-OLD FAN, MAX**

I suppose it really does depend on the game. Banjo-Kazooie's Clanker's Cavern and Rusty Bucket Bay definitely caused a lot of anxiety for fear of running out of air, but then Banjo-Tooie removed the air problem in Jolly Roger's Lagoon, but the area was huge. Meanwhile, I've always enjoyed Sonic's Hydrocity particularly because of the speed and Bubble Shield. James Bond's The World Is Not Enough submarine stage had abhorrent swimming segments. Of recent memory though, I did enjoy the water in Mario Odyssey and Wonder.

I'd definitely say Mr. Krabs. He's incredibly fun to play as in Nickelodeon All-Star Brawl 2. The Wild West stage featuring him in The Cosmic Shake is also fantastic and as an aside, it's wonderful the developers got his actual VA, Clancy Brown, to voice him. His performance absolutely completes the character.

To be brutally honest, until that Nintendo Direct, I had actually never heard of the Endless Ocean series. I'm not entirely sure how the series had stayed off my radar, but from the footage shown, I'm somewhat interested. It might be a fun game to play with friends online with voice chat.

Thank you for your time and consideration. **— MARK J. VIGNONE**

I honestly really like water levels. They offer a nice change of pace if done right. I especially love the music! Some of my favorite music in gaming comes from water levels. Dire Dire Docks, Treasure Knight's Stage Theme, Aquatic Ambience — they're all so good!

My favorite crab in gaming has got to be Krabby from Pokémon. I just love it when he says "Cookie! Cookie!" in the anime. It gets me every time. Also, just for fun, my second favorite is the Sidestepper enemy from Mario Bros.

I first heard about the Endless Ocean games last December on a livestream of a streamer I like. Fast forward a couple months, and I found a copy of the first Endless Ocean at a local thrift shop. Nice! Since it seemed fitting, I planned on playing it during the summer, but imagine my surprise when Nintendo announced Luminous! They really put me on the spot this time! Hopefully, by the time this issue comes out, I will've already completely submerged myself in all that is Endless Ocean and have dived headfirst into Luminous. **— DANIEL INVERSO**

As someone who was in elementary school during the 6th Gen, the first thing that jumps to my mind when I think of crabs in video games is of course Heavy Iron and Joe Whyte's Mr. Krabs from Battle for Bikini Bottom. Yes, for all those of you who always wondered why we have "Smoky Lungs Krabs," it's because THQ hired Joe Whyte to fill in for Ernest Borgnine on Mermaid Man, and Clancy Brown on Mr. Krabs, because they "had scheduling conflicts, and wanted too much money" respectively. That audio was of course all carried over for THQ the Second and Purple Lamp's "Rehydrated" edition, and now all the kids who first played that game on Switch know why they sound weird. Additional Fun Fact: Mr. Whyte was the voice of Chris Redfield in the GameCube remake of Resident Evil. Let it never be said you don't learn anything from reading the letters section, kids! **— ZEEBOR**

CARTER'S CORNER

Hello again! The quiz question last time was "How many Peaches have I rescued?" The answer to the quiz is nine!

I've beaten Super Mario Bros., Super Mario Bros. 3 and Super Mario World on the NSO NES and SNES apps (using the rewinding sometimes), as well as Super Mario 64, New Super Mario Bros. 1, 2 and U, Super Mario Odyssey and Super Mario RPG. But if you count replays, my count is closer to 25!

On to this issue's theme! Pretty much every game I play technically has water in it, but I only go underwater in Mario games.

Speaking of Mario, I'm uploading more levels in Super Mario Maker 2 — based on bosses in Tears of the Kingdom! Here are their Course IDs: 5YJ-9LN-HJG, 9MK-4XR-4YG and YCJ-2W2-HFG. Good luck battling the bosses!

Also, here's a level-making tip: If you're making a hard level with different sections in it, make Hidden Blocks near the start that take you to the goal. If you've beaten it in sections one at a time, it's possible, and it's faster if you skip them while uploading it. Everybody will go the intended way because they don't know the Hidden Blocks are there.

Quiz Time! When Issue #72 is published, I'll have beaten Tears of the Kingdom. How did I attack Ganondorf? Answers next time!

MEETING THE TEAM AT PAX EAST!

Hello, my son recently met your team and wanted to write a thank-you letter:

I am a huge fan of Nintendo Force. My first issue was about Pikmin 4. It's my favorite series and I have the poster on my wall.

I got a bunch of old issues for Christmas. I love reading about games like Mario Maker – I wish some of its cool features were in 2. Or 3, when it comes out.

I recently met your team at the PAX East Nintendo Force meetup and we had a lot of fun.

Keep up the great work! — **YOUR FAN, JASON LAMB**

I'm so glad you got to meet up with Rebecca, Maggie and Jonathan at PAX! We'll try to get even more of our team members there to greet fans in person next year!

THE PLAYER'S POLL

Congratulations to **Calvin Bablitz**, the winner of our most recent Player's Poll! Your new chance to win is below, and this time around we're interested to read your responses to three questions about the legendary Akira Toriyama!

QUESTION #1

What was your first exposure to the work of Akira Toriyama? An episode of Dragon Ball Z? Playing a Dragon Quest game? Chrono Trigger, maybe?

QUESTION #2

What is your favorite character design from Akira Toriyama? Could be a hero, a villain, an NPC or even just a common monster!

QUESTION #3

What would you say is Akira Toriyama's greatest contribution to the world of video games? We want to know your #1 choice! (And why it's #1!)

Send your responses to **PlayersPoll@NFMagazine.com** with the subject line "Player's Poll for Issue #72" – this time, one reader whose answers are picked for print will win a game that Akira Toriyama helped to bring to life!

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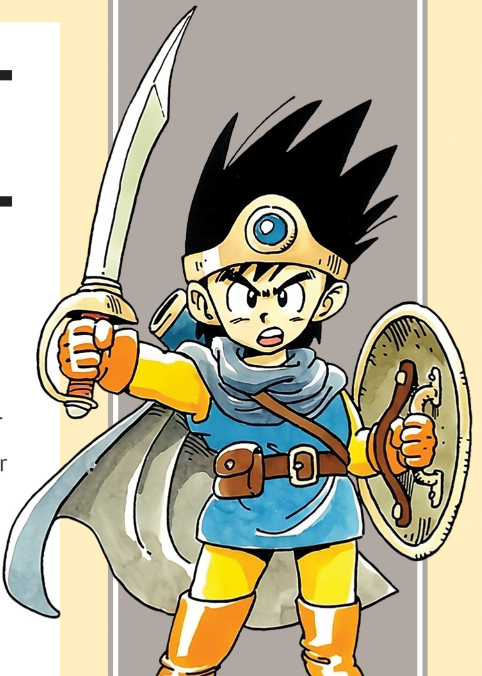


BY THOR THORVALDSON

NF Adventures at PAX East 2024

Even more members of the Force found their way to Boston this year! Here's what they saw!

PAX HAS BEEN around in one form or another for 20 years now, so it feels oddly appropriate that this year's Boston event was absolutely jam-packed with cult classic nostalgia.

The show felt a bit smaller than last year, with fewer games, more merch and not a ton in terms of big news or announcements. But what it lacked in blockbusters it more than made up for with the special, cozy feeling that comes from sharing the love of some obscure game or movie with a group of strangers. Bonding over mutual interests is a great way to break the ice and meet new people! More than ever, it felt like the real PAX East was the friends we made along the way.

Nintendo's presence at the event was relegated almost entirely to their Pokémon Play Lab booth, with Scarlet and Violet being promoted alongside the latest digital version of the Trading Card Game. Waiting in line to play one or both games could score you free prizes, like a special PAX-themed pin and a pack of Pokémon cards. Nothing about these games was exactly new, but if anything, that made the warm, familiar atmosphere around them all the more comforting.

In fact, most of the "new" games at the show showed their age on their sleeves with pride. Killer Klowns from Outer Space, an asymmetrical competitive horror game based on the '80s film of the same name, stood prominently near the show floor, its gaudy, circus-themed booth making it a perfect fit for PAX's long-standing carnival bazaar atmosphere. Nearby was New Blood's giant Fallen Aces area, with 1950s décor designed to show off the noir-themed FPS's stylish art direction.

There was also a giant tank containing a demo for Sand Land, the new game based on a 24-year-old manga made by the late Akira Toriyama. Then there was a huge display for Retroware and Programancer's The Transylvania Adventure of Simon Quest (a parody of/tribute to the '80s-era Castlevania games), and a makeshift speakeasy to promote Shadows of the REDACTED: REDACTED Remastered, a re-release of the now 13-year-old action/horror title. Everywhere you looked, there were sights that reminded you of something strange and exciting from the past that's poised to turn heads again in the future.

We also had the chance to catch up with Suda51, co-creator of Shadows of the REDACTED, who waxed nostalgic with us about the ways that games have both changed and stayed the same over the years. He was also kind enough to pose with a copy of Issue #51 of NF from a few years back, which featured more than 25 pages of writing about his work! . . . Then he took the issue with him, which was surprising, as we had already sent him a few complimentary copies a while back. The fact that he wanted more was pretty flattering!

Famous game developers weren't the only folks at the show to show NF some love! Our own Nadia Oxford,

Maggie Jones Lutey and Rebecca Rudranath (decked out in her signature Shaymin hat) were all at the show this year as well, hobnobbing with attendees and catching up with industry veterans. Actress, model, StreetPass Boston organizer and occasional Nintendo event representative Miz Sylver even invited Rebecca to compete in a special Nintendo Feud gameshow, playing on Team Mario. Unfortunately, Rebecca and her teammates ended up losing to Team Donkey Kong, though everyone who competed walked away with a prize. Just being there was a win!

Nadia also hit the stage for a panel called "Nintendo Gone Mad: The Zelda Games We're Trying To Forget." Organized and hosted by Jared Petty of Limited Run Games, the panel also included developers who worked on the original CD-i Zelda games, as well as some of the big names behind Arzette, a new game made in the style of those infamous off-brand Zeldas. Nadia was the only one up there who wasn't intimately involved with the development of either set of titles, and she did an amazing job reviewing the history of Nintendo's early relationship with CD-ROM technology, as well as being the voice of the everywoman who experienced these games from the outside as a confused and amused fan.

Limited Run's booth on the show floor also featured a meet-and-greet with the creator of Arzette, as well as Jeanne Basone, the co-star of Plumbers Don't Wear Ties, another ill-fated CD-ROM title from over 30 years ago. Unlike Arzette, Plumbers is an FMV game that played like a racy, low-budget romantic comedy, and it has somehow also made its way to Switch. Back in the '80s, Jeanne wrestled under the name Hollywood for GLOW, the Gorgeous Ladies Of Wrestling federation. Members of WayForward's River City Girls development team were also on site at the LRG booth, and they were quick to tell me that hanging out with one of TV's first dropkicking women was a highlight of their weekend.

There were also sightings of Jasper Byrne, creator of 2012's million-selling indie horror hit Lone Survivor, hanging out with Dan Adelman (one of the minds behind Nintendo's first digital storefronts) and Billy Basso, the creator of the upcoming Animal Well from Bigmode Games. Jasper was showing off a new build of Lone Warrior, a game set in the Lone Survivor universe (still in development), but only to people who he knew, or to friendly folks he had just met. I was lucky enough to check it out myself, and I was amazed by how intense, scary and fun it was.

But the most exciting get-together at the show, at least for us here at NF, was the official NF Magazine meetup in the Handheld Lounge! Maggie, Rebecca and myself were lucky to meet some readers old and new, amongst a backdrop of Nintendo cosplayers of all shapes and sizes, including a giant red Pikmin that suddenly strolled into view. Unlike writers for video game websites, we NF writers rarely get to interact with our readers, so it meant the world to us to get to spend real time seeing people holding our physical magazine in their hands. We gave out a few back issues to readers who wanted them, and also a handful to bystanders who had never heard of us! The shared experience of knowing and loving Nintendo games can go a long way toward bringing people together.

What this year's PAX East lacked in bombast and big announcements it more than made up for in surprises and silliness. It felt less like a big industry event and more like a glorified party themed around the love of games. That's how PAX started, before it became a multi-million dollar enterprise, and from the looks of it, that may be where the future of the show is headed as well. While that may not bode well for the business folks behind the event, for attendees like us, it felt just right. And who knows, maybe NF will have a panel, or even a booth, at a PAX in the future? Either way, we'd love to see you there!
– JONATHAN

Build Your Island for Real!

It's not just Mario any more: LEGO has expanded into the Animal Crossing series!

THE LEGO SETS based on the Super Mario series have been lucrative for LEGO, but can they keep that momentum going with all-new Animal Crossing sets? Historically, Animal Crossing merchandise hasn't performed that well. The games are wildly popular, but the amiibos flopped, and the merch recently released in Japan hasn't flown off the shelves like other IPs. So it'll be interesting to see how sales go for this new product line!

I do love that the LEGO set containing Nook's Cranny is the most expensive, at $74.99. It also includes Rosie's house. Popular doggo Isabelle stars in her own set, Isabelle's House Visit, as she stops by to check on island resident Fauna and admire her home. It's $39.99. Kapp'n's Island Boat Tour is the next most expensive at $29.99, and it also has Marshal. Bunnie's Outdoor Activities set goes for $19.99, and lastly, Julian's Birthday Party is the cheapest in the product line, at just $14.99.

LEGO did an incredible job of bringing the style of Animal Crossing into these minifigures and sets, which is impressive when you're working with round cartoons versus angular blocks. The sets are also advertised as fully customizable, which should go without saying given they are creative building sets, but the sets do lend themselves to the sorts of customizations allowed in the series as well. Rearranging the layouts of the scenery and the buildings is half the experience!

Link Deluxe

Poses and accessories abound for this new Figma!

YOU'VE GOT TO admit that Tears of the Kingdom has great accessories. Rockets! Rock Swords! Ancient Construct Weapons! Good Smile knows this as well, as they have included these items and more in the DX version of their new Link Figma. He even has an Ascend ability portal piece so you can make it look like Link is coming up through your shelf! (The figure can come apart at the midsection so each half can be displayed defying physics . . . or just mortally wounded?) It also has Rauru's arm and Link's Hylian hood. Rounding out the set are the Paraglider, a rocket effect piece, alternate faces, an arrow and the Traveler's Shield.

This DX version will set you back around $110, but if that's too steep there's also a standard version. Both standard and DX editions come with the Hylian Shield and Master Sword, and Link has a quiver full of arrows, the battery belt and his Champion's Leathers already on. The standard version is a little over $60. Previous Link Figmas have been so fun to pose, and it's infinitely better with all these accessories.

Look for it to arrive in the States around July 2025, or you can import the Japanese version in February 2025.

BY BRETT MARTIN

Car Mouth on the Move

Vroom! This Kirby car can really rev up and go!

ANOTHER KIRBY FIGURE just popped up in the vast pink world of Kirby merch, and he's got quite a mouthful! Carby from Kirby and the Forgotten Land is ready for his Pop Up Parade debut in July of this year. Another Pop Up Parade Kirby figure riding a Warp Star is set to release in June, and you can pre-order both right now. These are around $25 each, but only one has a zoom feature. That's right, the little pink car that could has a pullback feature! There have been other Car Mouth Kirby figures that have been released, and even some plushes, but none have been able to actually drive. Normally Good Smile's PUP figures don't have features other than being collectible plastic, so it's nice to see them go the extra mile! It's also larger than I expected, easily fitting in your hand at around seven inches. They hit the details, too, like all the little rust spots on the old beater. Ensky's recent version doesn't have that — or moving wheels for that matter!

New Official Mother 3 Merch!

The Hobonichi Mother Project delivers again!

LUCAS. HIS TWIN CLAUS. Duster. Princess Kumatora. Plushes of each main character in Mother 3 were announced alongside the incredible (devastating) news that the game would be hitting Nintendo Switch Online's GBA lineup . . . in Japan only.

While fans still can't play Mother 3 officially anywhere other than Japan, we can ogle at its official merchandise from the Hobonichi Mother Project. Not familiar? It's an ongoing product line dedicated to the Mother/EarthBound series, created by Shigesato Itoi's company, Hobonichi. They've been periodically releasing goods that fans have been clamoring for for years! This plush set was created with Norihiko Sakata of Bandai Spirits fame. The good news is that Hobonichi's website now has a way to ship items to the USA, so importing is slightly easier/cheaper than before.

If the Mother 2 plush set of the Chosen Four is any indication, this set will be around $100, with shipping being around $20-$30 based on where you're at and how fast you want them. Preorders will begin in mid-May, but the official date hasn't been announced as of print time. They'll ship about a month after that, if previous experience serves. Fans out there may be saying, "Where is Boney?!" Well, Boney was released previously in a larger size when the project began and now fetches nearly $400. With no plans to re-release, that one might be a tough find! Hopefully Hobonichi will instead release another set with Boney, Flint, Salsa and maybe even Fassad or Hinawa. One can dream. Also still available on the site are a number of previously released Mother 3 items, including Lucas, Claus, Salsa and Chimera plush magnets that are "2.5D" figures meant to be displayed on a fridge. There are also keychains, bead charms and a souvenir plate from New Pork City!

The Ultimate Casting Decision

Shadow the Hedgehog will be portrayed by none other than the breathtaking Keanu Reeves!

HE'S BEEN CAST as Ted "Theodore" Logan in the Bill & Ted trilogy. He's stepped into the role of Neo in the many Matrix movies. He's become the infamous assassin John Wick, and DC Comics' demon-hunting detective John Constantine and even a guy trying to keep a bus from slowing down. But finally, *finally*, Hollywood's given Keanu Reeves a role truly worthy of his considerable talents.

Keanu will next become Shadow the Hedgehog. Whoa.

The announcement went out on April 16, thanks to The Hollywood Reporter. According to their sources, Mr. Reeves was offered the role of Shadow in the upcoming third live-action Sonic the Hedgehog film, which is set to simply be called Sonic the Hedgehog 3.

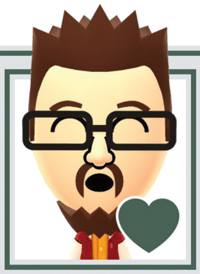
Now I suppose this whole news story is a spoiler in a way, but it's been two years since Sonic the Hedgehog 2 hit theaters, so if you haven't seen it by now, you probably don't care one way or another! Shadow was teased at the very end of that film, the same way Tails popped up at the end of the first. That's the proven formula: Never leave your audience walking out the door without giving them a glimpse of some other fan-favorite character!

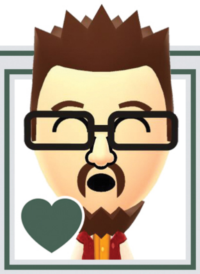
Jim Carrey, who starred as the live-action Dr. Eggman in the first two films, has also been confirmed to be reprising that role. There was some concern he might not, since Jim had announced that he's stepping back from acting entirely! Easing himself into retirement, I guess. It's kind of him to carry on in the Eggman role for consistency and continuity – no doubt the new sequel would've suffered if he would've had to be recast.

The story synopsis for Sonic 3 so far points to a lot of potential interaction between Jim and Keanu on screen – that'll be a treat, and a Hollywood first since those two superstars have never starred opposite one another before. (Maybe once?) Apparently this time around Dr. Eggman is depressed and out of shape following his defeat at the end of Sonic the Hedgehog 2 – however, he gets his villainous vitality restored when he creates Shadow to be the ultimate rival to Sonic.

Tails and Knuckles should also be back in big supporting roles. And maybe some other animal friends will appear? I wouldn't mind them sidelining a lot of the human characters, since they were the definite low point of 2. Just shuffle them all out to give Keanu extra time to shine! **– LUCAS**

Great!
Keanu Reeves will be the perfect Shadow! Hooray!





Also Great!
And Jim Carrey is coming back too. Extra hooray!

FORECAST

A meteorological look at the biggest game and DLC releases currently scheduled to debut in the next few months.

THIS ISSUE OF NF is coming in hot, as the two titles that most inspired its oceanic theme will almost certainly already be on sale by the time print copies land in subscribers' mailboxes. But no apology will be made! We wanted to do the water theme anyway, so you'll just have to deal with it! (Ahem.) Another Crab's Treasure is available on Switch as of April 25, and we've got an interview with its lead developer ahead on Page 59!

THIS THIRD INSTALLMENT in the easygoing Endless Ocean series was also due to debut on April 25 before Nintendo pushed it back one week at the last minute. (Perhaps respecting Another Crab's Treasure and not wanting to step on its claws!) Now it'll go on sale on May 2, and we've got a preview for you ahead on Page 40. Our review next time!

YOU'LL GET THREE weeks of uninterrupted swim time before Nintendo will try to pull you out of the Ocean and redirect you toward their next adventure: the gorgeous-looking remake of Paper Mario: The Thousand-Year Door! It will open its doors to fans old and new beginning on May 23, and I'm sure it will be the Switch's biggest success sales-wise this year. One last pre-release look is prepped for you, ahead on Page 42!

THINGS WILL SUDDENLY go dark this summer! Luigi's Mansion 2 HD, a new port of the game once known as "Dark Moon" on the 3DS, missed a great marketing tie-in with the April 8 solar eclipse. Alas! (It's also showing up a few months too early for this year's Halloween season.) Oh well, June 27 will have to do. See more on Page 45!

BEYOND THAT JUNE date for Luigi's Mansion, Nintendo has nothing else pinned down release schedule-wise as we head to press with this edition. Third-party publishers have plenty in the works for the back half of the year, though, like this great-looking new Teenage Mutant Ninja Turtles game! Get a first glimpse on Page 49, and start getting yourself mentally ready to rock with the latest take on the TMNT.

AND BECAUSE I decide what goes on this page, I'm going to go ahead and promote Ys X: Nordics in this spot! Why not? It's an on-theme, nautical adventure! It may not be ready to set sail until this Fall in North America, but that doesn't mean you can't go ahead and start getting hyped for it! See our new preview on Page 44.

> The Switch is certainly slowing down as we head toward the summer months of 2024. Nintendo's developers are hard at work on the next generation of games, toiling away behind the scenes on the software that will ultimately become the launch lineup for the next big system from the Big N! As your anticipation builds for that eventual reveal, don't miss out on the late-gen hits like the Paper Mario remake. Or why not attack your backlog? — **LUCAS**

AS BRETT REPORTED just two pages ago, the iconic Mother 3 has just arrived on the Switch by way of the Game Boy Advance lineup of games on Nintendo Switch Online . . . in Japan.

But that kind of also means it's finally been made available in America? Sort of?

It's not translated, of course, but you can play Mother 3 in its original Japanese if you are a Nintendo Switch Online subscriber who has also added the extra Expansion Pass to your subscription.

You may've already done this at some point in the last several years, but if not, here's how. First, you need to make a Japanese Nintendo Switch account. Go to accounts.nintendo.com to do that. Make a new account using a new email address, and set its region to "Japan."

Then, on your Switch, add a new user. Give it a name and picture, and when prompted to add a Nintendo account to its profile, sign in to the new Japanese account you just made. Fire up the eShop next, choosing that new user when you do so. That'll take you to Japan's eShop instead of America's, and there you can track down and download Japan's versions of each of the NSO apps. Grab their GBA app! Mother 3 will be waiting for you when you launch it. It's a great game, even with a language barrier! (It may just inspire you to learn Japanese too.)

MATTHEW TARANTO HERE, taking a quick break from making comics to gab about game design for a moment. A decade ago, NF Magazine gave me the opportunity to write a Developer's Diary about the process of creating my indie game, Tadpole Treble. Since then, it got enhanced and ported to Nintendo Switch as "Tadpole Treble Encore" in 2021, and now it's getting its own physical cart!

So what went into the porting process? TT has always been a small operation, and the Switch version was mainly handled by a team of three: My brother Michael and our programmer Stephen handled the coding, while I dealt with audiovisual matters.

PORTING THE WATERS

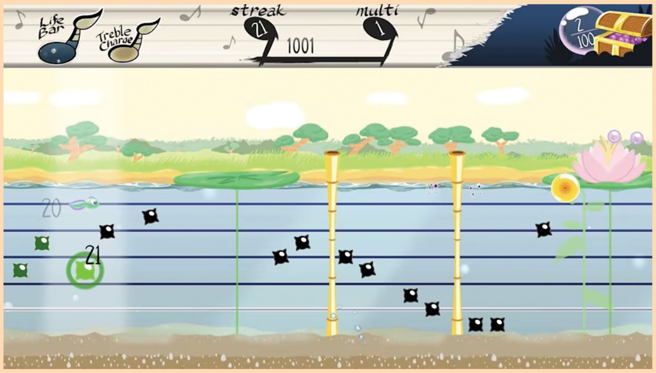
It started with getting a Switch devkit (that I may or may not have swiped the kickstand from to replace my own loose one; don't tell my brother!). We then had to blow the dust off the old engine and make sure the code was compatible with the latest updates. After squeezing in a new level, TTE had to undergo the lengthy lotcheck and testing processes just like its first time around.

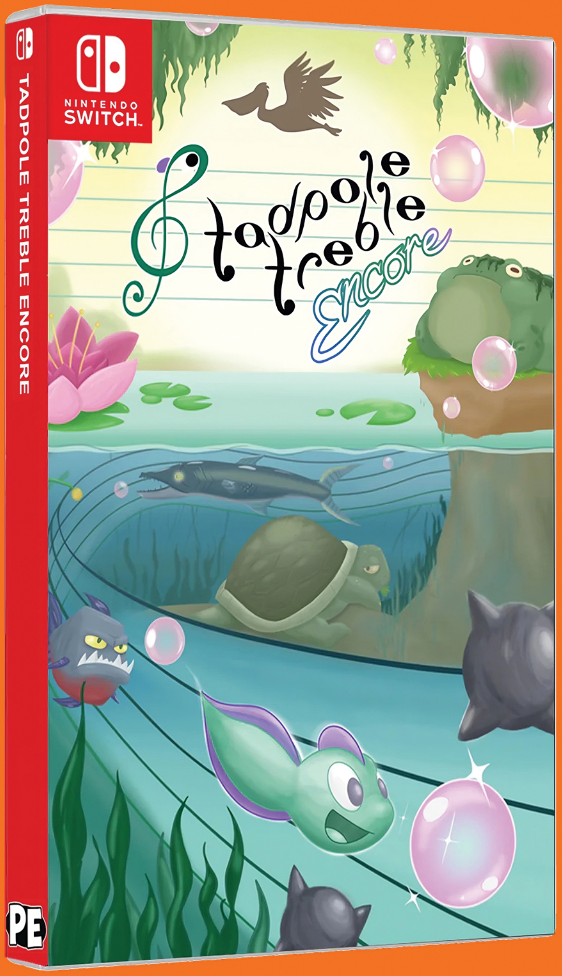
Lotcheck is when Nintendo essentially tries to break a game. Their playtesters put it through its paces and make sure they don't notice any red flags. These can range from frustrating bugs to inconsistent terminology, such as "Joy Con" in the in-game text rather than the correctly hyphenated "Joy-Con." Once everything looked good, we then needed to whip up some new images for things like the Switch menu icon and various promotional art featured on the eShop page. And for the physical version, we had to re-submit the game to be checked out by the ESRB.

In addition to Nintendo's testing, I was the designated bug hunter for Baton's adventure yet again. That meant multiple 100% runs through the game as usual, getting every S-Rank, every F-Rank, every Bubble and Medal possible, plus composing a few things in the in-game editor too. I'm certain I've put more hours into this game than anyone else on Earth.

KEEP YOUR TRAY TABLES UP

In order to make TT more enticing, we wanted to add something beyond the expected portable play. Two of the more prominent pieces of feedback from TT's original lap around the waterways were that people wanted 1) more context around the final encounter, and 2) simply more content. So I thought we'd address both those things by cramming in a new stage before the last boss. Due to the way the game works, with sheet music functioning as the level design itself, this also meant a brand-new song was





PREORDERS NOW AVAILABLE!

THE PHYSICAL VERSION

Tadpole Treble Encore's retail release actually features two different versions to choose from! (Just keep in mind that as of this article, they're up for preorder but not quite complete yet, so some of this could feasibly change.) The Standard Edition includes the requisite game + case with brand-new art, as well as a fancy foil slipcase with a different illustration on the front. Inside is a full-color manual, a Challenge Card, and if you preordered, a bonus Dog Tag. The Challenge Card is a fun competition that Premium Edition does, where you'll receive a themed card that lists a specific in-game challenge to shoot for. Fulfill that challenge to win a patch for that game! The fancy Retro Edition comes with everything in the Standard Edition, plus a CD of the entire game's soundtrack (by me!) and an SNES-style retro box to contain everything. Plus, there's a secret Bonus Item that I'm revealing just for you fantastic NF readers: It's the Travel Guide booklet from the original Kickstarter! Part manual, part Player's Guide. All of this can be found at **PremiumEditionGames.com**!

on the menu. And since the lyrical pieces such as Thunder Creek and Midnight Bayou were among the most popular, I knew I wanted to make another. With six sung songs, Tadpole Treble Encore is pretty much a full-blown musical!

The extra Switch-exclusive area (named "Aisle Isle") serves as an introduction to what exactly is going on during TT's final act via a jaunty song with both playful lyrics and dark undertones. I won't spoil the details for the uninitiated, but in writing the patter-song, I really wanted to push the "A.I. overlord" themes as well as cram in as many acronyms as possible. And it comes full-circle with a brief glimpse of sincerity as Baton reflects on her journey up to that point . . . before cutting into an ominous prelude for the final showdown.

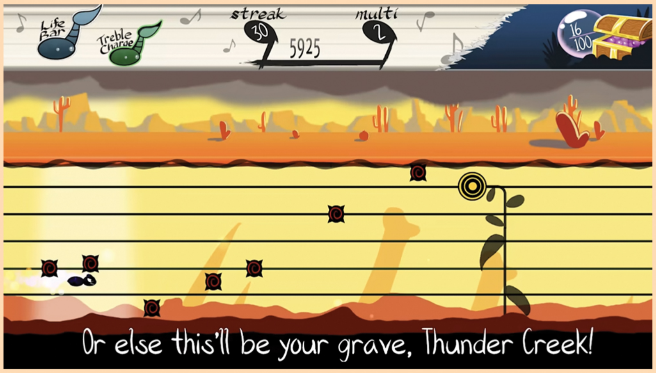
PHYSICAL MUSICAL

Shortly after Encore released, an online buddy of mine (Grant) contacted me and said he knew of a team that might be interested in publishing a physical cart of TT. Naturally, I jumped at the opportunity, as one look at my "office" (game room) will make it clear that I'm definitely a physical media kind of guy. Twelve shelves absolutely loaded with discs, boxes and carts dating back to the NES era, very much ready to display a game of my own.

The team in question turned out to be Premium Edition Games, who share my passion for physical carts. Their previous releases have all featured high-quality cases, plus extras that you usually don't get nowadays, such as music CDs and manuals! We were happy to hear they loved TTE, so I got to work on a slew of new art pieces to adorn the collectibles on their way.

ONE LAST NOTE

So is the fancy physical release the end of Baton's long journey? Perhaps so; while we've been asked about it several times over the years, we've got no plans for a sequel (although I did draw up a bunch of ideas on paper just for the fun of it). But having an official cartridge of our own is a real milestone for me and my brother, who shares my lifelong passion for game consoles and physical media. While we keep busy with many other projects, we're also still thinking about what other games we could make happen in the future! Video game development is tricky – full of work, commitment and uncertainities – but like any worthy artistic endeavor, it can also be very rewarding! **— MATTHEW T.**



Team Atlantis Surfaces on Switch

WHAT THEY DON'T SEA

AS THE WHO once sang, the kids are alright.

What They Don't Sea started its life during a Girls Make Games summer camp, where four junior high schoolers from North Carolina – Claire, Catie, Riley and Twyla – formed "Team Atlantis" to create their story of deep-sea research and exploration. Their demo won the grand prize during 2019's GMG Demo Day, judged by a panel including such luminaries as former Sony Interactive Entertainment chairman Shawn Layden and Nintendo of America's localization director Reiko Ninomiya. This netted them professional mentorship to further polish their concept, and a 2021 Kickstarter raised them the funds to bring the development team to bring the finished product to both PCs and consoles.

As a diver for the Rachel Carson Research Organization (named after the American biologist whose work paved the way for the United States Environmental Protection Agency), your mission is to explore the depths for sources of alternative energy and observe various sea creatures in their natural habitat. But instead of swimming, you're exploring the seas platformer-style! I loved the jumping mechanics, which reminded me a lot of the "floaty" jumps used in the classic Cave Story, and the slower-than-usual speed allows you to make precision adjustments on the fly if you need to land on an overhang or hop on the back of a manta ray.

You're assisted by a handy angler fish drone, which moves on its own and allows you to fire beams that stun dangerous creatures (like puffer fish or moray eels). And, when it's powered up by the colored kelp that grows in abundance on the seafloor, the drone also allows you to blast through walls! Some of these walls can only be broken by a specific kelp color (which was a good way to add a little puzzle and strategy to what is otherwise a simple Metroidvania).

The ocean floor exploration is linear, but you're able to restart on any of the five maps you choose if you back out into the main menu. Along with your research goals, you're also tasked with cleaning garbage from the waters – and there's also a bunch of friendly sea creatures looking for your help, like a bluefin tuna that needs an escort through a stinging jellyfish swarm back to their school, or an octopus who wants help to liven up their humdrum home with pretty shells.

There are no real penalties for running out of air or getting chomped by a hostile fish, and the game auto-saves your progress, which makes it good for pick-up-and-play action.

Even so, it took me a little over two hours to get through all five of the maps – although perfectionists will want to try to find all the sea creatures, as well as pick up all the litter.

One feature that I wish could have been implemented is a bigger level map, especially one that could be accessed by a button press.

Before I started writing this review, I watched Team Atlantis' Demo Day pitch video on the game's Kickstarter page to see how everything got started. Their goal was to have players come away with a deeper understanding of the ocean, and they achieved that swimmingly – it was still just as evident in this polished final product as it was in their original concept.

What They Don't Sea was $4.99 well spent, for a game that can be enjoyed by all ages – and one that will hopefully inspire other future developers, as well! Definitely give it a look if you've got a game-making girl in your home. **– REBECCA**

SWITCH PUBLISHERS: GIRLS MAKE GAMES & LEARNDISTRICT
DEVELOPERS: GIRLS MAKE GAMES & TEAM ATLANTIS RATING: E

8.0

Life After the Flood

HIGHWATER

A WORLD SUBMERGED.

I pray that no scenario so severe ever plays out in our lifetimes, but the realities of climate change have made such fears feel fitting. Correct. Appropriate. Drastic apocalyptic events like entire cities being swept into the sea can, these days, sometimes feel less like fantasy and more like entirely plausible glimpses into humanity's harrowing future.

. . . And on that uplifting note, here's Highwater! A video game in which you get to play the role of a survivor still trying to eke out some sort of existence in a world where the oceans have engulfed all but the uppermost floors of a handful of skyscrapers.

Living out of a dingy dinghy that's constantly in a state of disrepair, you ride the waves to travel between what few land masses remain. Then you disembark, explore a bit on your own two feet, usually come across some small item like a bit of food or a half-empty tank of gas for your boat's thirsty engine, and return to said boat to repeat the cycle.

It's all rather grim.

And all rather beautiful! Though your heroes' situation is dire, their spirits remain bright and their world is vibrant. This kind of end of days is pretty to look at, at least.

As you hop from island to island, the downtime of travel is filled with the reassuring sounds of Highwater Pirate Radio. Other indie games I've played have adopted this same approach: using an in-universe radio station to provide not only the background music of the game, but also to drive the narrative with news, interviews and general commentary on the looming doom and gloom.

I realized only later that the reason why this radio-station story approach felt familiar is that the first time I experienced it was in the last game made by this same indie team! They made "Radio Nostalgia from Mars" for their game Golf Club: Wasteland, which I reviewed two years ago in NF #58. Highwater is a direct story prequel to that post-apocalyptic golf game. Huh! This is what that game's apocalypse was!

Exploration isn't all there is to do, thankfully. Highwater also includes grid-based tactical combat scenes! I'd just wrapped up my time with Persona 5 Tactica (reviewed later in this same issue), when I jumped over into this game, and there are a few similarities between the two.

. . . Though, with Highwater, that same kind of strategic combat feels a lot rougher. It's easy to take for granted all of the nice quality-of-life features that games like Tactica and Mario + Rabbids include to help streamline their battles . . . until you play a game that's sorely lacking those same kinds of features.

Highwater's combat feels clunky, with your characters' actions always feeling underexplained. It's hard to know the available range for your weapons, how far you can move, what the enemies can do . . . and the menu screens between battles are similarly frustrating. I shouldn't have to fumble through pressing every button on the controller to try to figure out how to equip an item or a new weapon I've just picked up! And battles' objectives are sometimes unclear too — there was a kind of tower defense fight that I played in which more and more enemies just kept spawning in after every turn, and I was at a loss for whether I was even playing the right way.

So Highwater has high points, but it's brought down by a lack of clarity. This water's too murky! **— LUCAS**

SWITCH PUBLISHER: ROGUE GAMES DEVELOPER: DEMAGOG STUDIO RATING: T

7.0

After 32 Years, a Sequel!

UFOURIA: THE SAGA 2

UFOURIA IS BACK!

And if that sentence fills you with a sense of, well, *euphoria*, then you must be among the blessed few who got to experience the original game over three decades ago. (Or not quite so long ago, through the Wii's Virtual Console.) Ufouria: The Saga, or "Hebereke" as it was known in Japan, was an oddball platformer with four goofy protagonists, a go-anywhere interconnected map years before anyone first used the term "Metroidvania" and enemy birds who attacked by trying to poop on you. All of those elements are back in this brand-new sequel. (Even the poop.)

When it was revealed, there was some confusion over whether or not this game was meant to be a sequel at all, or if it would be more like a graphically overhauled remake of the NES game. But it is a sequel after all: Though the same cast of heroes is here and they each have the same abilities they once did, the level design is totally new and there's a new story driving the gameplay. In this game, an alien invader named Utsujin (once just a minor boss on NES) has started spreading gloopy, sticky Bumyons all over the world, and our heroes must use their cleansing Popoons to wipe them out.

Hebereke, a penguin who lives in a tree and washes his face in a toilet each morning, is our primary protagonist – but he can find and recruit his three friends to his cause once he rids each of them of mind-altering Bumyon poison. All of them have unique traversal abilities, so the world expands further when each is added to the team.

The thing that really opens up exploration, though, is the vending machine that sits underneath Hebe's home tree. It's stocked with items like springboards, mine carts and maps that end up being essential to seeing all there is to see – and gathering all the items the team needs.

So the gameplay loop is: A) Buy new stuff from the vending machine to open up the world a bit more, B) Venture out from home base to explore the area that just got opened up, C) Collect coins and "Utsu-cans" in that new area to be able to D) Go back to A and start the cycle again. There's a convenient fast-travel bird that gives the heroes a free ride back to Hebe's tree at the end of each area, and the overall rhythm is fun.

You do end up revisiting lots of the same areas multiple times, but interestingly, there's some roguelite level design tossed into the mix here – the platforms, enemies and other obstacles will always be remixed a bit every time you re-enter a previously seen scene. That was unexpected, but welcome. Even if all the areas were laid out the same each time, though, I still wouldn't have minded running back through due to just how gorgeous everything is. I don't know why more games haven't picked up and run with the "everything is made out of fabric" visual aesthetic in the years since Nintendo first brought us Yoshi's Woolly World, but it's a perfect fit for this finally-revived, long-forgotten franchise.

Ufouria: The Saga 2 is not too challenging, but that makes it a great choice for younger gamers (the ones who'd most appreciate its silly slapstick moments and use of poop and potty imagery for laughs). I was overjoyed all the way through as someone who's familiar with the old game (there are even cameos from Bop-Louie and Freeon-Leon!), but even if you don't have that nostalgia, it's still delightful. **– LUCAS**

SWITCH PUBLISHER: RED ART GAMES
DEVELOPER: SUNSOFT
RATING: E

THE PENGUIN WITH CAT POWERS

HEBEREKE

Most often just called Hebe (which is pronounced heh-beh, but my kids say "heeb"), this proud penguin is the polar opposite from most of his polar-dwelling kind. For starters, he can't swim. Not at all. He'll just flail around if you try. He also can't handle himself on ice, as he'll slip and slide all over the place. So what can he do? He can cling onto sheer walls and climb straight up them, kind of like a cat – but only after you buy the Suction Cup item from the vending machine. (That machine may be the real hero of this game.)

THE CAT WITH PENGUIN POWERS

O-CHAN

It's great to have friends whose strengths cover your weaknesses, and that's exactly what O-Chan does for Hebe. This cool cat (who is really a human girl in a cat costume, but don't tell anyone), can swim straight across the surface of water with ease. She also finds firm footing in all environments, even icy floors. And to make her set of powers even more penguin-aligned, she can also unleash an ultimate attack of freezing breath, which turns enemies it touches into ice cubes! Who mixed up these two animal types so much?!

9.0

THE GHOST WHO LOVES GREEN TEA

SUKEZAEMON

Sunsoft is reusing the "Ufouria" rebranding from decades ago for the name of this game in the West, but not the localized names from that era. So this ghostly guy, once known as Shades outside Japan, now has his original name all around the globe. Sukezaemon, as a partially incorporeal being, has a lighter body than the others – so he can hop over longer gaps between platforms, as well as drift slowly downward to more safely descend in vertical stages. If you fully power him up, he can even turn invisible to avoid foes!

THE FISHMAN WITH A STOMACHACHE

JENNIFER

Finally, jolly old Jennifer is an upright, ambulatory angler fish with near-constant gastrointestinal distress. He's got the team's second set of swimming-related skills, but whereas O-Chan can cruise across the surface of bodies of water, Jennifer can sink below and explore submerged areas with full freedom of movement (and no need to come up for air). His extra power, if you save up enough to buy it, is that he can barf up bombs that can then be hurled to blow up certain walls. (He'll need an extra antacid afterward, though.)

He's Not a Mega Man, He's a . . . BERSERK BOY

AMONG THE MANY Mega Man series that have been published by Capcom, there was Mega Man ZX for the Nintendo DS: a henshin-styled semi-Metroidvania take on the Blue Bomber franchise from the folks over at Inti Creates (Blaster Master Zero; Azure Striker Gunvolt). Aside from its inclusion in the Mega Man Zero/ZX Legacy Collection, Capcom has shown little inclination to go back and wrap up the loose ends and cliffhangers it left back in 2007. (A *very* frustrating habit of theirs, if we're being honest.)

While not a return to that world and cast of characters, Berserk Boy at least manages to capture much of the spirit of what made Mega Man ZX so much fun to play. Like ZX, the focus is on gathering the four different elemental Berserk Orbs that the evil Dr. Genos has bestowed upon his followers in order to decrease his power over the denizens of New Hope City, while increasing your own.

Berserk Boy zigs where ZX zagged, however, by providing a much more linear experience. Rather than choosing a particular boss to go after, all the levels come in a fixed order, and each is broken up into several smaller (but still pretty meaty) stages. While this feels antithetical to the Mega Man style of platforming, it really works pretty well here. Stages are built with a knowledge of what powers you'll have when first entering them, yet still have different hooks for you to come back and investigate when you've got newer powers. It's a different take on how Metroidvanias tend to work, but tends to work really well.

Furthermore, the action just feels really, really good, bringing back the sort of kinetic feeling I so loved in the Gunvolt Chronicles: Luminous Avenger iX games. It can seem a little rough in the early going, but as you use the shop to power yourself up and acquire new attacks and abilities with each new Berserk Orb, you start to feel like *you're* the boss as you get closer to the end of the game. Kei, our primal protagonist, ultimately adopts Lightning, Earth, Air, Ice and Fire forms as he blazes through each stage.

The visuals use pixel art of a strong caliber, like the best stuff you'd see on the Sega CD or Sega Saturn: detailed and well animated. The legendary Tee Lopes provided a banging soundtrack that will stick with you long after you put the game down, and there's a nice dose of some pretty alright English voice acting here, too. (It's more sound bites than extended dialogue, so there's only so much to judge there.)

In a way, I feel like Berserk Boy is to Mega Man ZX as Freedom Planet is to Sonic the Hedgehog. And I mean that in the most complimentary way possible.

Go Berserk! You might just enjoy it. **— DAVID**

8.5

SWITCH PUBLISHER/DEVELOPER: BERSERKBOY GAMES
RATING: E

9.5

Going Supersonic for a Second Time

FREEDOM PLANET 2

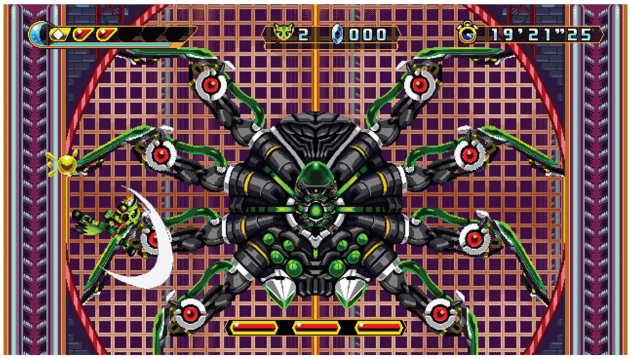
AS MUCH AS I love the original Freedom Planet, its overall package was rather rough. Thus, over the several years following its release, lead designer Sabrina DiDuro and her ever-expanding team hunkered down in the GalaxyTrail kitchen to smooth out those edges and deliver a spectacular sequel.

And boy, did they cook! Sprites are larger and feature revamped character designs. Dynamic camera zooming helps emphasize the scope of the action. Even Sonic Mania director Christian Whitehead was contracted to streamline the engine!

As in a certain other series about a speedy blue anthro, Freedom Planet follows an animal posse that races through enormous biomes, replete with branching paths and themed gimmicks. However, married to the high-speed antics is Treasure-inspired action, as you square off against highly detailed mechs that take cues from Gunstar Heroes, Alien Soldier and even Mischief Makers.

The sequel's playable squad includes the returning trio of Lilac, a speedster with a Sparkster-like boost attack; Carol, who prefers rapid slashes and kicks before tearing away on her motorbike; and Milla, the technical wild card with alchemy-based defensive and offensive arts. And rising from supporting cast to leading role is Neera, a frost knight whose versatile ice magic and staff techniques establish her as the Zero of the group.

Our gals' skill sets have been tweaked in favor of faster normal strikes and shorter special meter cooldown, and they can all weave out of harm's way with a new dodge mechanic. That, alongside a drastic reduction in damage incurred from chain attacks – one of the more egregious combat bugbears in the first adventure – allow battles, especially against the colorful variety of marvelous bosses, to be even more awe-inspiring without descending into slog territory.



But Freedom Planet isn't just about Genesis-era action! It's also anime as heck! The first title reveled in fully voiced dialogue and lengthy cutscenes that explored the rich dynamic among the cast – to a point that many found cringey. You could chalk that up to both Sabrina's lofty storytelling ambitions and the relative inexperience of the voice cast. Fast-forward a decade: Former amateurs like Dawn M. Bennett and Sean Chiplock are now seasoned vets, breathing nuance into a narrative that no longer feels like overwrought padding. (It also helps that they're supported by additional well-known talents like RWBY's Lindsay Jones and the Prince of All Saiyans himself, Chris Sabat!)

We haven't even touched on the equipment loadouts that allow you to alter difficulty at a whim, or the challenge mode/boss rush framed as a WWE-style coliseum! It seems that Freedom Planet 2 simply does so much – perhaps a bit *too* much. There's a stretch of levels that feels like a ramp-up toward the climactic showdown against the main villain, only for an entire second half of the game to open up! It's a cleverly concealed swerve that makes the adventure feel like two halves of a grander whole, not unlike Sonic 3 & Knuckles.

But considering that Freedom Planet was roughly the length of S3&K already, and this sequel winds up nearly three times as long – well, you might wish that GalaxyTrail had trimmed off some of the excess.

Even with this larger serving, though, Freedom Planet 2 never lost its robust flavor. Sure, I may not feel compelled to replay it immediately like I did with the first one, but I eagerly await the day when that urge will strike again!

– TONY

SWITCH
PUBLISHER: XSEED
DEVELOPER: GALAXYTRAIL
RATING: T

Another Style of Sonic Successor
PENNY'S BIG BREAKAWAY

THE TEAM BEHIND Sonic Mania has a new game, and they sure have returned in style! You play as Penny, an eager young street performer who uses a living yo-yo as part of her act. Her participation in her town's biggest talent show goes horribly awry, and before she knows it she's on the run from the pompous and prideful Emperor Eddie and his legion of silly penguin guards.

Let's just get the most obvious question out of the way: "Is this just a 3D Sonic game with the serial numbers filed off?" And the answer is a refreshing "Nope!" Penny's Big Breakaway is a 3D action platformer through and through, but it plays very differently from the Blue Blur's back catalog. Each stage is short and self-contained, with a few branching paths, but ultimately heading toward the same goal.

Momentum is the focus here rather than pure speed – Penny has an enormous array of yo-yo tricks up her sleeve, and chaining together these tricks will keep you moving forward at a quick clip as you build up combos and earn a higher score. The game urges you to just keep moving and take risks in these obstacle courses – overly cautious play will often land you in bottomless pits, or buried under a dogpile of penguins. (Wait . . . maybe that would be a "penguinpile" instead?)

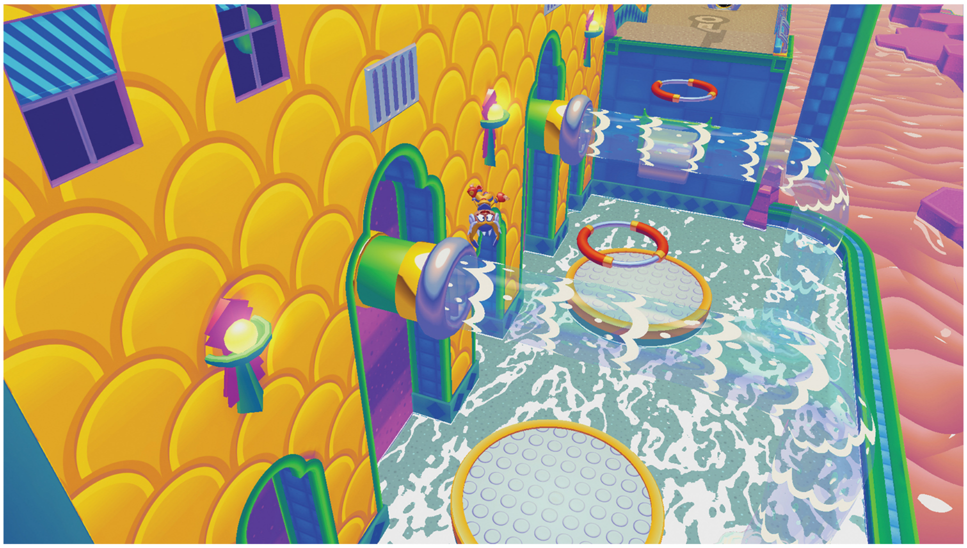
This might just be one of the most charming games of the year! The world of Macaroon is made of brightly colored shapes and wacky setpieces. One stage has you swing past gigantic water faucets in a huge bathtub, while another lets you ride on massive dinner receipts in a lava-powered restaurant. Want to visit a space library or a penguin party? This is the game for you!

Adding to the cartoon zaniness are the random Macaroon citizens who inhabit each level. Some of them will give you short missions that net you rewards, but most of them just have genuinely funny one-liners about your adventure. And at the end of each stage, you can busk for the crowd and they'll give you more money to spend on power-ups!

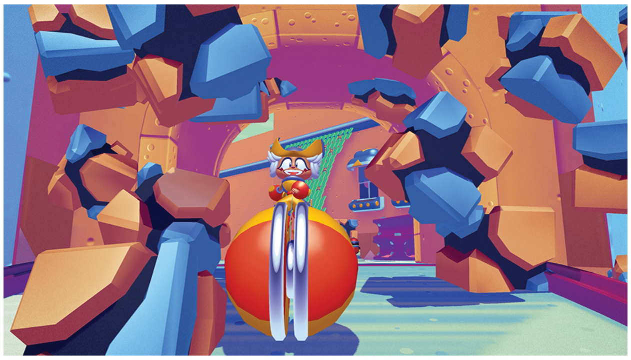
While each stage has its share of hazards, the penguins themselves are the only actual enemies – but even they come in a variety of sizes and shapes, and look hilarious when you use your yo-yo skills to cartoonishly flatten them against nearby walls. The bosses are also brimming with personality and each have their own motives for getting in Penny's way. This is a world that feels alive every step of the way.

The blend of old and new game design will make you feel nostalgic while you enjoy the fluid, modern mechanics. In another timeline, this would've been precisely the flagship game that Sega would've promoted on the Saturn or the Dreamcast. The aesthetics look like something out of Ristar or Dynamite Headdy, and that kind of simplicity keeps the game running at a consistent framerate while constantly giving you something new to look at.

The music by Tee Lopes and Sean Bialo also marries the past and present with catchy tunes that sound like remixes of a Genesis game that never existed. There's a lot of appeal here, no matter your age!



SWITCH PUBLISHER: PRIVATE DIVISION
DEVELOPER: EVENING STAR
RATING: E

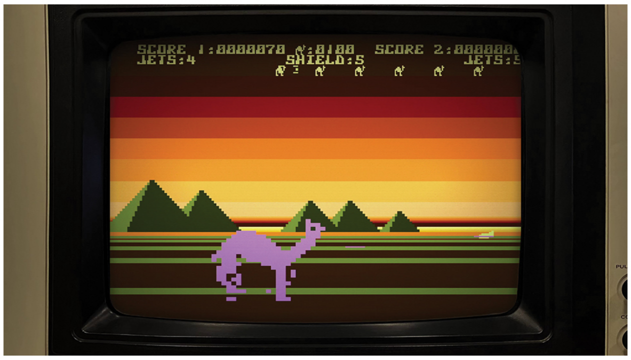


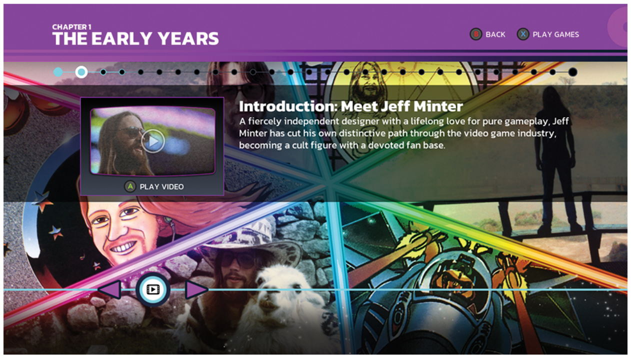
Unfortunately, Penny's Big Breakaway does share one notable similarity with the Sonic series, and that's in the occasional weird glitches that trip you up every so often. These bugs are by no means overwhelming or plentiful, but it can be disorienting when they do pop up.

Collision for the walls – especially walls on the outer edge of the stages – can be hit or miss, and it's not that hard to intentionally clip poor Penny through a building and watch as she falls to her doom. The camera is fixed presumably because the game wants you to spend most of your time moving instead of fiddling with the perspective, but sometimes it will get confused as to Penny's location and abruptly make your life difficult. You won't encounter these issues enough to get truly frustrated, but you also might scratch your head and say, "Uh . . . was that supposed to happen?"

Despite those small problems, Penny is packed with replayability. You're rewarded with art for a virtual scrapbook for getting a high enough score in each stage, which can be accomplished by keeping a high enough yo-yo combo going without taking a death. The sidequests also offer collectibles that unlock bonus challenge courses to really test your skills. Timid players should be aware that you're expected to jump, swing, roll and flip quickly from platform to platform instead of holding back and waiting for just the right opportunity to move. Nervously inching forward will get you nowhere, so try to let loose and make those leaps of faith with confidence! If you keep practicing, soon you'll be able to enjoy all the speed and flowing movement the game has to offer. (And you'll look really stylish while you're at it.)

I would've loved a Sonic Mania 2 as much as anyone, but you know what? I'm much more impressed and happy that this team united to bring us an all-new experience with a new world and new characters. Penny's Big Breakaway doesn't quite play exactly like anything you've seen before, and that's the kind of innovation that we need more of in gaming. Maybe Evening Star will return to the world of Macaroon some day? Or maybe they'll give us even more all-new adventures? Either way, I wish them the best of luck in their future performances! – **LINDSEY**





Walking in a Minter Wonderland

LLAMASOFT: THE JEFF MINTER STORY

IF YOU GREW up in North America, there's a pretty good chance you've never heard of Jeff Minter – but in Europe, his name is legend! It's for this reason that I'm incredibly thankful that Digital Eclipse has dedicated the next volume of their Gold Master Series to his remarkable career. I grew up as a console gamer, and in my 40 years of playing I've obtained, at best, an ancillary knowledge of Llamasoft's existence. And while I can't say this collection has made me a fan of their games, I'm absolutely now a fan of the man behind them.

Here in the States, PC gaming has always been around, but it's never been anywhere near as big as the home console market. But in many European territories, the PC was king, while platforms like the NES never gained the same foothold as they did in other parts of the world.

As such, I suspect many of the people reading this review were in the same boat as me, completely unaware of what the European PC gaming scene was really like decades ago. Llamasoft: The Jeff Minter Story tells that tale through the perspective of one of its most prolific independent developers, and it's quite a fascinating story indeed.

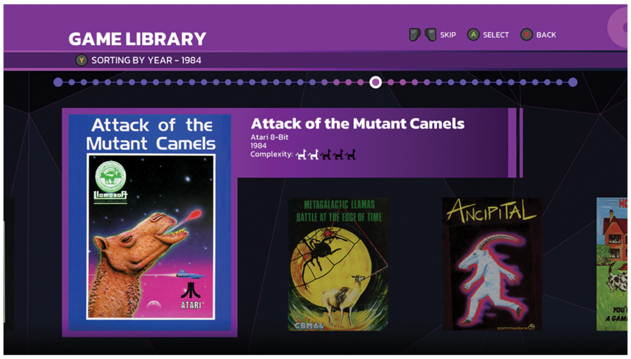
This is the second entry in Digital Eclipse's Gold Master Series, which aims to be the video game equivalent of a film documentary. The focus isn't to simply compile a bunch of games in one place, but to present them as part of an interactive timeline that also includes interviews, concept art and behind-the-scenes footage. After all, preservation without historical context is only half of the story! It's in this aspect that this game succeeds with flying colors. In fact, you don't even need to like any of the games in this collection in order to get your money's worth. (Which I can confirm to be true, as I can honestly say I wasn't a very big fan of the bulk of the releases presented here.)

The thing about these games is that they're strangely complex. Most of the best retro arcade games could be easily understood within a few seconds. Much of what's presented here builds on those concepts with new ideas, but often in perplexing and unintuitive ways.

Indeed, it's the games that are this collection's weakness. What's included is fascinating, but unless you're willing to put in the work to unravel the mysteries of each game's mechanics, you probably won't find all that much enjoyment. The selection itself is a bit strange too, with the vast majority hailing from the earliest days of the company. Just about everything post-Tempest 2000 is only mentioned, not playable, including the sensational 1996 Atari Jaguar game Defender 2000, whose absence is a hefty blow.

But even those issues aren't enough to keep this game down! The experience of learning about this often-overlooked segment of video game history was an absolute joy from top to bottom. Digital Eclipse's interactive documentary format continues to be an absolute win, and I can only hope that they keep making more for years to come. **– KRIS**

SWITCH PUBLISHER/DEVELOPER: DIGITAL ECLIPSE RATING: T



An Exciting Boring Adventure!

PEPPER GRINDER

ONE GAMING COMMANDMENT I hardly ever break is, heaven forbid, using the analog stick for a side-scrolling platformer. Thou shalt not! But Pepper Grinder – from Ahr Ech and Devolver Digital – had me rethinking that rule almost immediately. The game features a seaside explorer, Pepper, using a massive drill to bob and weave through soft dirt in a manner as smooth as it is frenetic. As such, the stick was a natural fit for taming the wild drill as our heroine looped and leapt like a subterranean ice skater.

And it feels great! Pepper Grinder absolutely nails its central mechanic, providing a clever spin on platforming that gives it a flow and rhythm all its own. Unlike past burrow-heavy games such as Dig Dug and Mole Mania, Pepper's tunneling plays out more like some sort of crazy underground flight. It's so enjoyable launching between segmented clumps of earth that it's almost a shame to have to handle the on-foot bits in the interim!

Then again, variety is another of this game's strengths. The levels are designed in a way reminiscent of the Donkey Kong Country games, where there's a distinct concept in each one that's introduced and gets pushed to its limit. One stage may have you shooting Pepper between moving cannons in a way very reminiscent of the great ape's platformers, while another takes a page out of Metal Slug and lets you do the shooting yourself with a drill-powered blaster. Jet skis, a helpful giant and a controllable mech are just a few of the other fun ideas that make each stage stand out. There are even a handful of boss fights to really test your mettle.

And while navigating the diverse areas, there's something just oh-so-satisfying about this game's sound design. The low hum of the drill mixed with lots of crunches, clinks and crumbles as you burrow across bones and baubles is candy for the ears. I wasn't as keen on the game's music, however. Given the pirate setting and pacing of the gameplay, I was hungry for some strong melody-driven songs (perhaps a sea shanty or two?) to keep me focused, but the tunes are largely too subtle and trance-like for my tastes.

Pepper Grinder isn't a long game, but its gameplay-first philosophy ensures each level stands on its own and doesn't become a slog. Expert gamers can shoot for the Time Trials that unlock stickers (which allow you to play around with art in a diorama-type diversion) and music tracks. Most importantly, they're good fun due to the tight controls and I earned the highest rank on nearly every stage – although a few aren't quite built around the idea as well.

Despite a few hiccups, Pepper Grinder is one of the better indie games I've played lately and I dig its classic approach to level design. Give it a spin – and don't forget to use the analog stick! **– MATTHEW T.**

8.5

SWITCH PUBLISHER: DEVOLVER DIGITAL
DEVELOPER: AHR ECH
RATING: E10+

Let's Attack Aggressively!

CONTRA: OPERATION GALUGA

IN THE 37 YEARS since the original Contra hit arcades, the series has seen more than its share of highs and lows. Following a string of attempts to modernize it in the early 2000s by making it gritty, putting it in 3D and generally mucking about with what made the franchise resonate with people in the first place, WayForward's Contra 4 for Nintendo DS revitalized the series in remarkable fashion. It rivaled the best of what Contra had ever offered before, and earned back the respect that had slowly slipped away from the series since its inception.

But not long after, Konami put the brand on ice for eight years – only to attempt to bring it back into the limelight with the immensely misguided Contra: Rogue Corps in 2019.

SWITCH PUBLISHER: KONAMI
DEVELOPER: WAYFORWARD
RATING: T

Not only was this wretched experience almost universally despised, it managed to exist as an object lesson on exactly how to fundamentally misunderstand what makes Contra work. After that long an absence, whiffing so spectacularly on its grand return nearly killed the franchise.

Fortunately, WayForward was re-recruited to right the ship once more – and I'm happy to report that this is an exceptionally fun game. (But holy cow is it also a mess.)

Operation Galuga stands as a sort of reboot for the series. It's mostly based around the events of the first NES game, with elements from Super C, The Alien Wars and Hard Corps thrown in for good measure. The story is told with some delightfully cheesy dialogue delivered via some surprisingly solid voice acting. The plot is completely insane and barely takes itself seriously. It's never too overbearing either, with cutscenes rarely lasting more than a minute.

The design, though, is where Operation Galuga really shines. This is 100% pure, classic Contra, with some fantastic modern touches along for the ride. Unlike most older Contra games, there aren't any levels that change the players' perspective: no over-the-shoulder corridor bits, no incomprehensible overhead Mode 7-fueled slogfests. Just good 'ol 2D running and gunning, with some fast-paced vehicle segments to break up the action! The object is to shoot everything that moves, and don't worry, there's rarely any reason to not be blasting away as often as

6.5

possible, with none of Rogue Corps' weapon cooldown times or ammunition limits in sight.

As you play, floating pods will occasionally show up that contain new weapons. You can equip two at a time, and all the classics are here: The Spread Gun, Flamethrower, Homing Missiles and more provide fun and exciting ways to attack aggressively across the game's eight action-packed stages.

As in Contra 4, weapons can once again be upgraded by stacking them. For example, where the normal Spread Gun shoots three projectiles, the upgraded version shoots five. The Crush Bomb creates powerful explosions, while its upgraded version creates mini black holes!

. . . But taking a hit will cause your weapons to power back down. Yes, you read that right! You can take hits in this game – but only if you want to. At the outset, you can choose to play either with a health bar or with classic one-hit kills, with no penalty for picking either over the other.

As for new mechanics, there's a dash move and a double jump, but these, as well as the weapons themselves, change depending on which character you choose. Beyond the classic Bill and Lance (complete with their signature red and blue pants), there's a number of others to choose from, including returning veterans and awesome newcomers, with each one playing slightly differently. Some have a standard dash move, while others have a slide or a grappling hook. Some have more speed but less stamina, while others' weapons look and function in unique ways. These variations help encourage multiple playthroughs, which you'll need to complete in order to obtain the many unlockables.

In addition to characters and music (ranging from classic tunes from Castlevania to Contra covers from Internet artists like RichaadEB and Banjo Guy Ollie), you can also purchase new attributes, two of which can be equipped before you begin your assault. These range from faster weapon upgrades to more health – which is great because, like all previous Contra games, Operation Galuga is a rather difficult game by nature. That said, this particular version makes its difficulty far more flexible, which old fans and newcomers alike will no doubt appreciate.

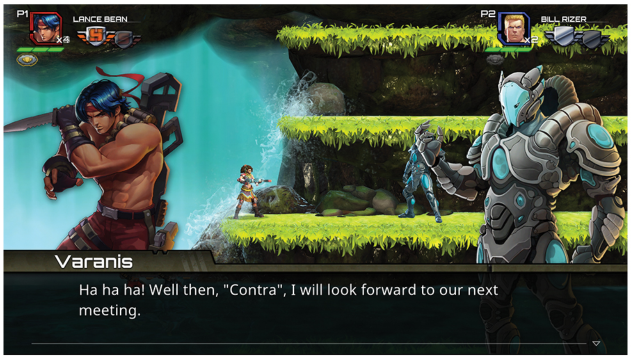
But for as great as this game is on paper, it's unfortunately held back by *truly astonishingly poor* technical performance. If you played the demo, rest assured that the final game functions considerably better than it did there, but there are still numerous technical issues that absolutely plague the experience.

The framerate is all over the place, especially when the action picks up. During my first playthrough, I saw entire pieces of the background suddenly disappear – and I even fell straight through the floor to my death at least once. The wonderfully hectic four-player mode is a blast for sure, but as the chaos intensifies, the game's overall stability tanks. I saw one player running waist-deep through solid ground for an entire chunk of a level. Another player was completely lost by the camera and nearly softlocked the game, which we only managed to fix by having her drop out and then rejoin. And the game full-on crashed a total of four times before we were able to reach the end! This is especially concerning because, while the game looks good, it's by no means a visual powerhouse, and nowhere near pushing the Switch to its limits. Given WayForward's track record, it's really quite strange that this game performs as poorly as it does.

But the worst issue of all, and one that nearly breaks the game, comes from a weirdly specific instance of input lag. Movement, shooting and menu navigation all work great, but for some reason, there's a palpable, extremely noticeable amount of delay when jumping. It's almost half a second! In a game that's constantly putting you in situations that demand extremely quick reflexes, that's a real killer.

Here's the thing, though. For as bad as all that is, it doesn't actually ruin the game. It comes close! But I've beaten it three times now, and while the myriad issues are frustrating, I still had an undeniably good time both by myself and with friends.

I've heard it actually runs great on the most powerful current-gen platforms, but this version simply feels unpolished and unfinished. The underlying experience is fantastic, and just about everything a Contra fan could want out of a modern iteration, but it's really hard to recommend on the Switch. **– KRIS**



What Lies Beneath the Waves?

DREDGE

I FIRST HEARD about Dredge from the free Dredge DLC that was added to Dave the Diver late last year, so I decided to give the game itself a shot for our ocean-themed issue. Even though their overall themes are radically different – a modern-day high-tech story of adventure and discovery versus a Gothic nautical horror story – their main gameplay styles work well with each other, as I would soon discover.

You play as a fisherman whose ship washes ashore in a small fishing village. By day, the seas are relatively peaceful, and you earn money to fix and upgrade your boat and equipment by selling your catch. There's also dredging equipment that can be installed on your craft, allowing you to salvage shipwrecks for materials and find hidden treasures sleeping in the waters below.

However, things aren't as calm and peaceful as they are on the surface – sometimes you find yourself catching strange, corrupted fish that make Jaws look like Baby Shark, and there are strange monoliths that show visions of destruction.

At night is when the *real* danger unfolds – the dangers that come from being alone in a tiny boat on the open ocean. A Panic meter appears at the top of the screen, denoted by a single eye that looks around nervously as rocks suddenly spring into your field of vision, glaring eyes and strange red mists filled with whispering voices drift across the ocean, and passing ships become monsters. Even worse, there are *real* monsters lurking among the islands that can affect you even during the day! (You can enable Passive mode to tame these monsters in the main menu, but good luck against everything else!)

Fishing and dredging is easy: All you have to do is press Y when indicated by the QTE patterns or to skip between the concentric circles of the dredging wench as it turns around. Instead of using a weight-based system, you manage your boat's cargo space by arranging fish in a grid, which results in thoughts like "How can I tesselate this cod?". Upgrades to your craft can be purchased from various ports and merchants, but you still have to be careful maneuvering out there: Not only can a hit against dry land damage your boat, it can also disable vital equipment.

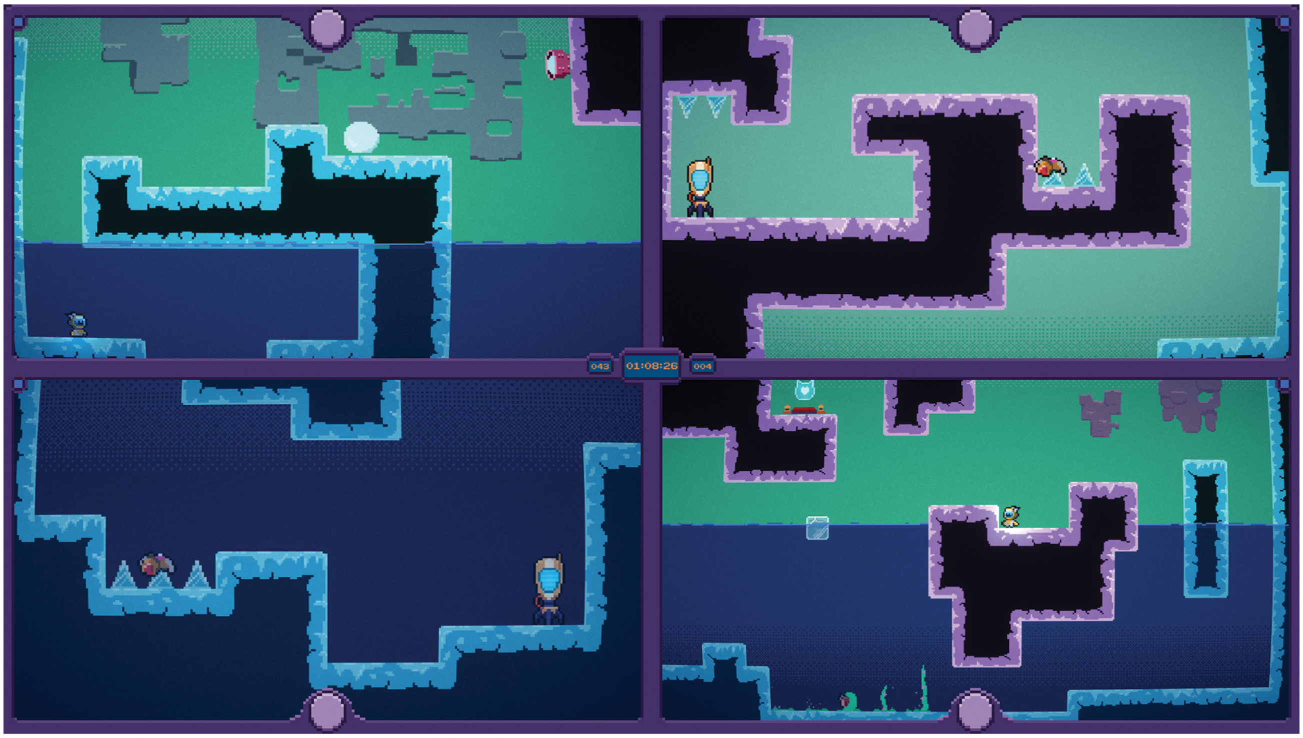
That being said, Dredge has the tendency to be grindy, and while you do eventually unlock access to fast travel, it comes with some drawbacks. The navigation system is on the bare-bones side too – there's a designated button to pull up and consult a paper map, which I admit works with the theme, but I still wish for something on-screen.

It may become kind of a drudge to play when you're grinding for upgrades, but Dredge really nails the feeling of being on a small craft all alone on the open water, gliding across the rolling waves (with a *lot* of emphasis on the *alone* part).

– REBECCA

8.0

SWITCH PUBLISHER: TEAM17 DEVELOPER: BLACK SALT GAMES RATING: E10+



Can You Play Four Games at Once?

QUADROIDS

THIS GAME BROKE ME.

I understand the concept of this game. I can see what I am supposed to do in this game. And yet, making my brain work to make my fingers move to press the right buttons to actually do what I am supposed to do . . . just, no.

Quadroids has you controlling tiny robots on four separate screens. Easy, right? Well, there are four quadrants, the bots are always moving, and you control the action with one of four buttons per screen (ZL, L, R and ZR). Still sound easy? Try it!

If there are multiple Quadroids in one quadrant, they all jump when you hit the button assigned to that quadrant. And they can all wall jump. Things get complicated quickly.

The game starts out introducing one Quadroid at a time, having the launcher appear in one quadrant and the goal in another. Soon, there are multiple launchers and multiple goals. The game keeps track of the time and how many inputs it takes for the player to succeed. Players can therefore take as long as they want and use as many lemming-bots as they need to succeed.

Sometimes you have to sacrifice a few bots to make forward progress. They will happily walk into spikes, dip into acid baths, waltz under hammers, freeze themselves, etc. Then the next bot can bounce off the first one's unresponsive chassis to gain more height or cross large chasms. (However, nothing can last very long in an acid bath, so some of the sacrificed bots disappear and need to be . . . *replaced* for certain hazards.) If a bot is incapacitated, the next bot launches immediately.

The most difficult thing to wrap my head around was trying to figure out which screen each bot was going to head to next. The game will give subtle clues – like the coloring of the ground – to indicate where the bot will go, but sometimes it's all one color and it's a surprise where they end up. The second most difficult thing was remembering which screen was assigned to which button. With only four buttons laid out exactly as they are on the controller, it would seemingly be simple. However, I'd wait to hit the button when the bot was in the right timed spot, and then I would hit the button I was using for the previous screen, because I was focusing on the character and not its surroundings. Maybe I've played too many platformers and have learned to always focus on the character and only deal with the environment as it interacts with said character? I'd like to report that over time I was able to shirk my habitual style and adapt to this new play scheme. Nope.

This is one of those games where I know what needs to be done but I just can't do it. I'd love to sit and watch a master figure out all of these complex action puzzles in real time and show me how it's done. I'd be in awe! As it is, maybe I've entered that dreaded old dog/new tricks era of my life and this one just isn't for me. Despite that, I kept coming back, so there is magic here and I think the developers did an excellent job of ramping up the difficulty and insanity.

But I also think they're masochists. Heh. **– BRETT**

8.0

SWITCH PUBLISHERS: JUST FOR GAMES & FABLOO GAMES
DEVELOPER: BLUE LOOP RATING: E10+

Fend off the Freaky Fish!

SPLATOON 3: SIDE ORDER

THIS GAME JUST keeps reeling me back in.

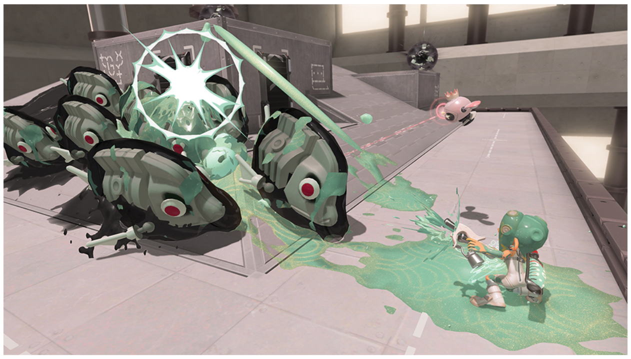
I've loved Splatoon 3 since its launch back in September 2022, when I played it extensively to be able to write our review in NF #62 (awarding the base game a 9.0 at that time). I fell in love with it again midway through 2023 when I got myself a little addicted to its great Salmon Run mode, as I'd regularly spend an hour or more each evening blasting Boss Salmonids alongside online allies. Now, this third Splatoon has captured my heart for a third time thanks to this brilliant new DLC campaign called Side Order. It offers yet another all-new and all-different way to play, and it is another addictive Splatoon experience that might just get its hooks into you, too!

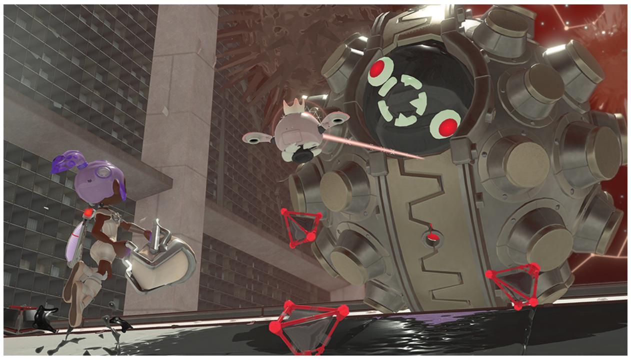
DLC PUBLISHER/DEVELOPER: NINTENDO RATING: E10+

With Side Order, Nintendo has mashed up a single-player Splatoon campaign with the design ideas of the roguelike genre. In this mode, your hero character – Agent Eight, making an encore appearance after starring in the Splatoon 2 Octo Expansion – is faced with climbing up the Spire of Order, an imposing edifice where each floor is randomly reconfigured every time you reach it. On your first run you might face a gauntlet of enemies spawning out of portals on, say, Floor 4. But then on your next time up the tower, Floor 4 could instead present a territory-control challenge. The next time? Maybe the only thing you'll find there is a vending machine!

That randomization of repeat plays is the heart of roguelikes, which define themselves by never offering the exact same experience twice. It's a smart approach for the Splatoon series to adopt, since one of the common complaints leveled against previous single-player campaigns in this series is that they lack replay value – you run through them just once, and you've seen all there is to see. Side Order fixes that.

Another complaint it addresses is the lack of enemy variety. That was one of the things that kept me from scoring the base game higher than a 9.0 nine issues ago – its one-player story mode reused the same old Octarian enemies from Splatoon 1 and 2. I wanted them to mix it up! And so now they finally have, as Side Order presents a totally brand-new slate of skeletal fish foes. Called the Jelletons, they form a fearsome force that oppose your efforts to advance further up the spire on every floor.





There are Battering Lentos: huge, lumbering bumphead parrotfish who slowly advance on your position and attack with smashing headbutts if they reach you. There are Panicking Alla Mambos, who run away from you in fright when you draw near – while chasing them down and defeating them is the win condition on their floors. There are Whirling Accelerandos, who spin-attack you like tornadoes, but if you manage to splat them, they leave behind the lower spinning-top portion of their bodies, which you can then use to attack other enemies! Nearly every new enemy has some kind of new, never-before-seen function, and there are a dozen different varieties – as well as a few brand-new bosses to battle too.

With all those new fishy foes to face, Agent Eight is going to need some upgrades! Luckily, there's another randomized element in Side Order: Every time you move up one floor further in the spire, you're granted a new power-up. These boosts and bonuses are presented as Color Chips (like the free samples of paint shades at a hardware store), and you load them one at a time into a Palette that starts out small, but ultimately grows into a whole kaleidoscope of different colors! This is Side Order's version of a skill tree, and some of the upgrades you can earn include increased damage output for your main weapon, buffed movement speed in Octoling or Swim Forms, and my personal favorite, Poison Ink, which makes all the turf you claim with your ink deal constant damage to any enemy that tries to cross over it.

There's more! Your main weapon, sub-weapon and special attack can all be swapped out for different sets on subsequent ascents – so you'll be armed with Dualies, Curling Bombs and the Reefslider on one run, but can switch over to, say, a Splat Roller, Burst Bombs and the Kraken Royale for your next attempt. And then there's Pearl! The goofy little Splatoon 2 singer is back and has been transformed into a hovering drone sidekick for this story (for reasons I'll let you discover on your own). She has her own power-ups and can become quite a capable supporting combatant in her own right!

Variety. That's the name of the game here, as Nintendo didn't want anyone blazing through everything here in the span of a single weekend, as many have done with earlier one-player Splatoon stories. And I think they succeeded, as I happily went back to this mode again and again for over two weeks in order to see it through to its finish line . . . and there are still more unlockables I could go back and shoot for even now, if I wanted to! There are unique Banners and Gear pieces you can earn that can then be used in other modes, like Turf War, so you can prove to the world that you are a master of the Spire of Order.

I think Nintendo nailed this DLC's design, as well as its difficulty level – you probably won't be able to win and reach the top of the tower in your first few attempts, but as with most roguelikes, failure is all part of the plan here. Every run, whether won or lost, earns you currency that you can invest in yet more upgrades and boosts, such that every time you tackle the tower, the odds will be stacked slightly more in your favor than the time before. It works well.

On top of everything it offers in the new Order Sector area it adds to the game, this DLC additionally activates Splatoon 2's Inkopolis Square as an extra, optional hub world for all your Splatoon 3 activities. Wave 1 of Splatoon 3's Expansion Pass also brought back Inkopolis Plaza, the Splatoon 1 hub area, so now all three eras of Splatoon are visitable in this one game. This series is still less than a decade old altogether, so I don't know how much nostalgia gamers in 2024 have for sights first seen in 2015, but it is nice to have all of those options available.

Where will Splatoon go next? A straightforward sequel on the next system? Spin-offs? A movie?! I don't know, but whatever it is, I'm sure it'll get me hooked all over again.

– LUCAS

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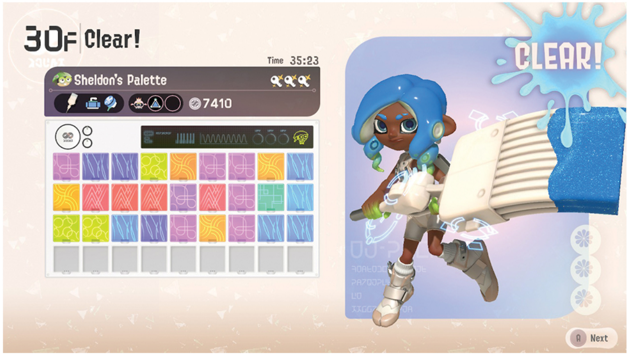
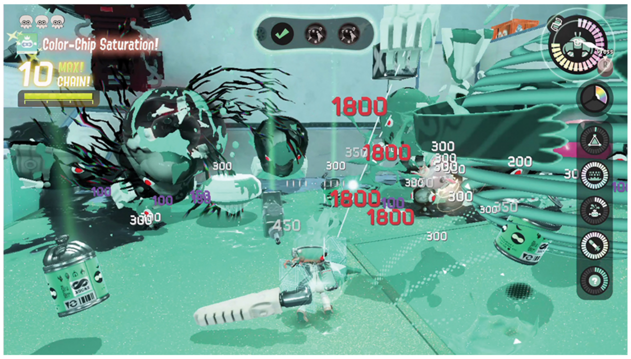




BY LINDSEY LAYNE KING

Does your video game lack variety?

Do you want to shock, surprise or maybe even stress out your players?

Are you looking for that one special secret ingredient that will enhance the flavor of your entire game design recipe, but you just don't know what to do?!

JUST ADD WATER

A SOURCE OF STRESS

TEACHING CHILDREN TO swim demands a lot of patience. You must introduce them to the water at a gentle pace, impart safety basics and above all else remind them to always remain calm. Because as fun as splashing around in the pool can be, those good times can quickly turn nasty without proper preparation.

Video games' method of swimming instruction, in contrast, is to kick players into the deepest, darkest ocean and see who floats. Altered mobility, reduced speed, diminished or outright nonexistent offensive options – nothing makes a player more eager to engage with an alien environment than when almost every skill learned thus far is rendered inapplicable in favor of a new set of "water-only" rules.

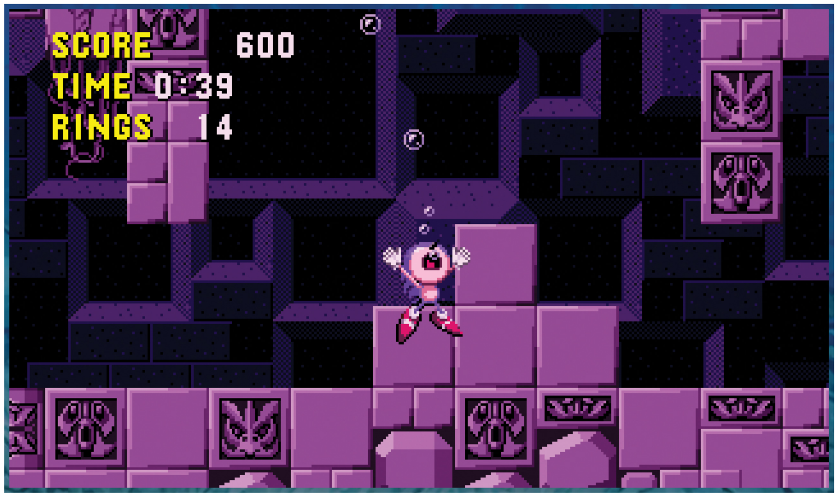
Ever get into a spirited discussion about how dreadful water levels are? Of course you have! And I bet you're familiar with most of the popular examples, too. Like the dam level in Teenage Mutant Ninja Turtles on NES – fumbling with literally broken swimming mechanics to disarm a scattered set of bombs concealed by electrified seaweed under a strict time limit.

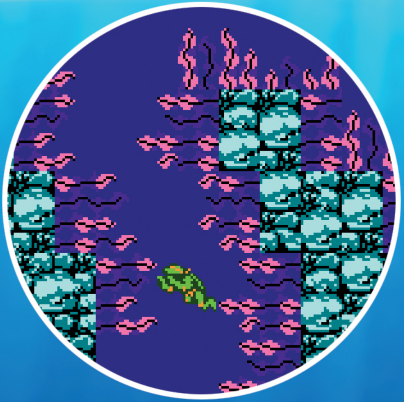
Or Labyrinth Zone in Sonic the Hedgehog – stripped of the Blue Blur's trademark speed and pressed to scour the cavern floor for oxygen pockets, the musical sting that warns of your impending suffocation ringing in your ears long after you've shut off the Sega Genesis.

There's Down the Tubes in Earthworm Jim – zipping around in a submarine with fidgety controls, pressured on one end by an air supply that runs out if you're too slow, and on the other end by a fragile glass encasement that shatters after just a few wall collisions if you're too fast.

And let's raise a glass to the infamous Water Temple in Ocarina of Time – constantly raising and lowering the water level, equipping and removing buoyancy-negating boots, all while navigating a series of submerged halls nearly indiscernible from one another.

What's remarkable is that, aside from their watery escapades, these titles are highly regarded classics (yes, even TMNT). It seems that in the interest of delivering a unique challenge that would only be experienced for a limited span of total playtime, otherwise talented developers tend to home in on the very aspects of aquatic exploration that fill most folks with dread. It's the oddest design blind spot – how else could you explain why, after conquering the 2D depths without the need to surface, Mario arrived on N64 saddled with an air meter, which once exhausted resulted in one of gaming's most disturbing drowning animations? "Yahoo" indeed! **– TONY**





SEASIDE SERENITY

JUST LIKE IN real life, getting in the water can induce panic or encourage relaxation.

Donkey Kong Country's Aquatic Ambiance proves that if the right music track is playing, even a challenging level can be relaxing.

Similarly, Dire Dire Docks from Super Mario 64 has a very serene tone (despite swimming with sharks and breathing coins). Super Mario Sunshine's Ricco's Harbor had a more upbeat theme, and Noki Bay had a relaxing aura – and Super Mario Galaxy's Beach Bowl Galaxy mirrored the relaxing air of both of those levels. Even the more recent Lake Kingdom and Seaside Kingdom in Super Mario Odyssey had Mario visiting an underwater city and playing on a beach at sunset, respectively.

In fact, the Seaside Kingdom reminded me of Wave Race 64 and its coastline playground. I worked so hard to unlock that dolphin to ride, and boy was it worth it!

Pokémon Ruby & Sapphire had portions where players needed to dive to find and catch new Pokémon deep down in the sea, and New Pokémon Snap has Maricopia, where photographers can snap up all the undersea Pokémon in a generally calm environment. You can even see a Wailord!

Thinking more obscurely, A Kappa's Trail is a game about a Kappa traveling through the sea to the world of humans. It was developed by Brownie Brown, who also created Mother 3, and there are several Easter eggs to find from that game.

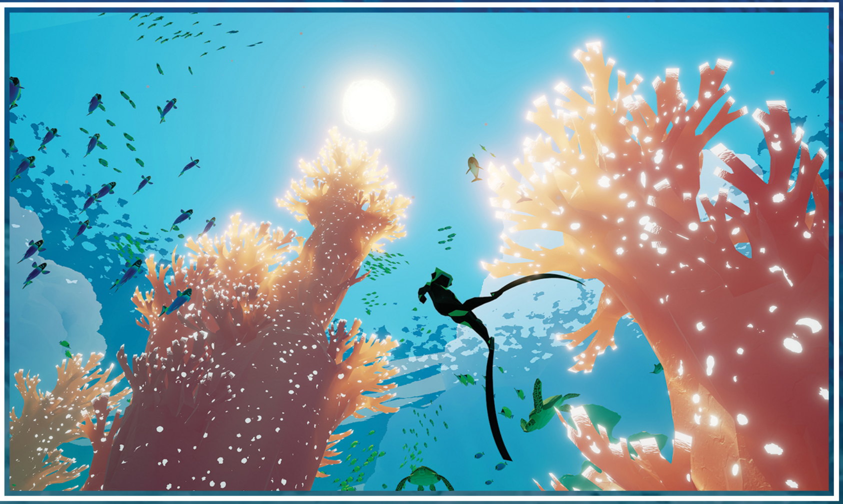
Kirby has a lot of beach scenes and underwater environments that typically are hosted by dulcet tones and light challenge. Float Islands and Orange Ocean come to mind, as you really only need to deal with the occasional Blipper or Glunk.

Even the Pikmin have aided many space travelers though several beaches and ponds. These are generally calm . . . until something large tries to eat you!

Sailing on the Great Sea was at most times peaceful, but nothing in Zelda's world beats the tranquility of Zora's Domain. Beginning in Ocarina of Time, most every iteration of the legend has Link hearing those steel drums and seeing the waterfalls. It's always a calming moment.

Everblue, its successor Endless Ocean and Abzû are games that are less of a game and more of slow-paced underwater scuba experiences. And We Love Katamari's water level is unlike . . . anything really! The Prince ends up rolling up all the denizens of the deep onto his katamari, and since there's no danger, players only have the clock to worry about.

These examples turn the tide from gamers dreading water levels to finding them to be relaxing paradises! **— BRETT**



THE SPOOKIEST SEAS

AS WE'VE ALREADY addressed in this mostly moist feature, water levels can be pretty darn stressful. But some liquid-laced games are *so* anxiety-inducing that they cross the line from frustrating into frightening! Here are some of our favorites.

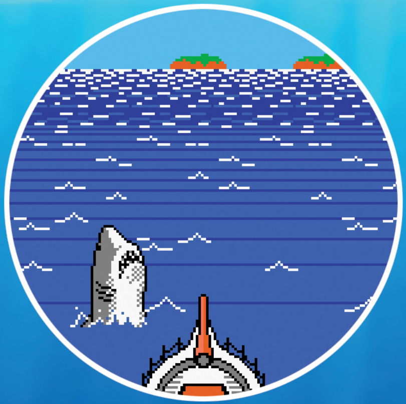
Jaws on the NES is an adaptation of the 1987 movie Jaws: The Revenge, co-starring the unlikely duo of Michael Caine and Mario Van Peebles. It's a pretty boring movie, but thankfully, the game does a much better job of delivering suspense and excitement. (Playing as Sherrif Brody's wife-turned-widow is a scary enough prospect on its own.) Throw in some jump scares from the titular great white's titanic fin and face-offs against any number of other aquatic creatures, and you have an '80s action/roguelike that makes every replay unpredictable.

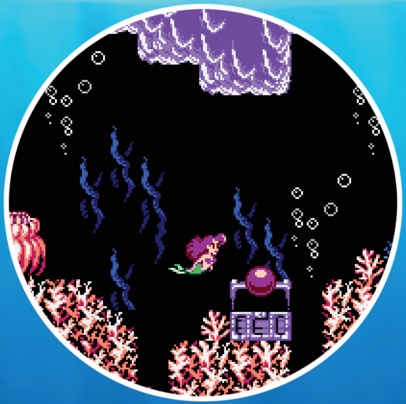
Even more surprising was the next game to give players a Jaws-like experience: Super Mario 64! This otherwise bright and inviting title suddenly took a turn for the dark and dangerous at Jolly Roger Bay, where Mario must contend with both his ever-decreasing oxygen meter and a giant man-eating eel known as Unagi. His cold, dead eyes and razor-sharp fangs are enough to give any kid nightmares — and even more so in his more modern encore appearances, where he's rendered in even more terrifying high-definition detail. (He goes by the name "Maw-Ray" these days.)

The Resident Evil series has also had its share of gilled goliath glow-ups. The original PS1 game and its remake on the GameCube both feature memorable showdowns against a massive zombie shark. Wading into waist-deep waters against a nearly invincible, undead monster was tough, but things got arguably even harder when series protagonists Jill and Chris went all the way under in Resident Evil: Revelations, where they took on all manner of nautical nasties.

But arguably the most unsettling waterborne monstrosity on Nintendo consoles is the Waterwraith, first discovered in Pikmin 2, and most recently seen in Pikmin 4. Made of pure H2O, this ghostly steamroller can flatten your childlike carrot people by the truckload. Everything about it, from the unholy sounds it makes to the unexplained way it falls into play out of thin air, is designed to creep you out.

And finally, we couldn't make a page about spooky/splashy games without mentioning Subnautica, the open-world survival game with an entire ocean's worth of terrifying undersea life forms to contend with. With a near-endless sea of trouble to sink your teeth into, its scares and surprises never have to end! **— JONATHAN**





FULLY SUBMERGED

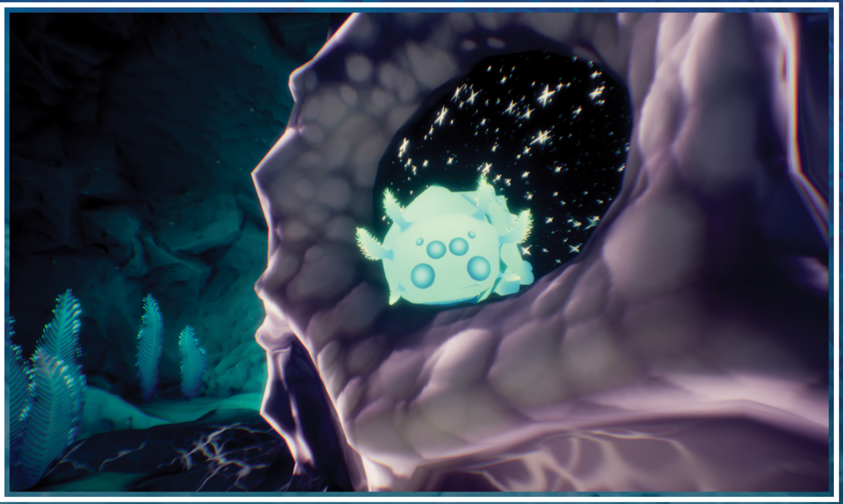
WHILE SOME GAMES will let you take a temporary ocean vacation, others want to fully submerge you in a watery world full of adventure!

The Starfy series is all about hopping in and out of the water. Starfy himself isn't quite a starfish, nor is he quite a star, so he has skills that can apply to the land, sea and even sky! While he's fully capable of dashing and spinning on land, most stages will involve diving through pools, leaping between floating water bubbles or just plain swimming upstream. The cast is largely ocean-themed as well, with Old Man Lobber the lobster offering advice and Moe the clam helping defeat enemies. There's just one problem: We've only ever had one of the Starfy games released in America! Nintendo, please release a collection of all the Starfy games so everyone around the world can enjoy this series!

Sure, the Starfy games are known for being pretty easy, but you know what fully aquatic game is the diametric opposite of that? Ecco the Dolphin. With its gorgeous visuals and new age soundtrack, this Sega Genesis title was promoted as being a very mysterious but beautiful story about one bottlenose dolphin's adventure to save his missing pod. You know what it's really about? It's about a dolphin who gets mauled by every single living thing in the sea as he desperately searches for air pockets so he can breathe. Ecco's journey does take an undeniably awesome turn when he meets the giant DNA monster made of meteors though! After that he uses a time machine in Atlantis to travel to the past and . . . OK, let's just skip to the end here. It was aliens. Aliens kidnapped Ecco's pod and the only way to get his family back is to knock the eyes and jaw off of the extraterrestrials' horrifying queen.

If you'd rather have some cozy undersea vibes, you could always venture to Mythic Ocean. Combining elements of visual novels and oceanic exploration, this game lets you guide the many gods of the sea and help them with their problems. You could help a free-spirited otter learn some responsibility, or perhaps befriend a suspiciously scary eel, or maybe feed a ravenous isopod-caterpillar-looking creature! There are plenty of other sea creatures to interact with along the way, including a breakdancing crab with some pretty sweet moves. As you explore, you're free to hunt down information on this underwater world's history, solving some of the mysteries surrounding this beautiful place.

Few games dare to take place entirely underwater, but those few that do always make a lasting impression. Why not test the waters of one yourself? **— LINDSEY**



WATER IS WONDERFUL

WATER CAN FEED on your anxieties, its deepest depths playing host to all manner of untold horrors. It can also be a source of idyllic comfort, a doorway leading to an otherworldly paradise right here on our home planet. To know water is to accept both its inherent dangers and blessings – and in doing so, align yourself with a powerful ally.

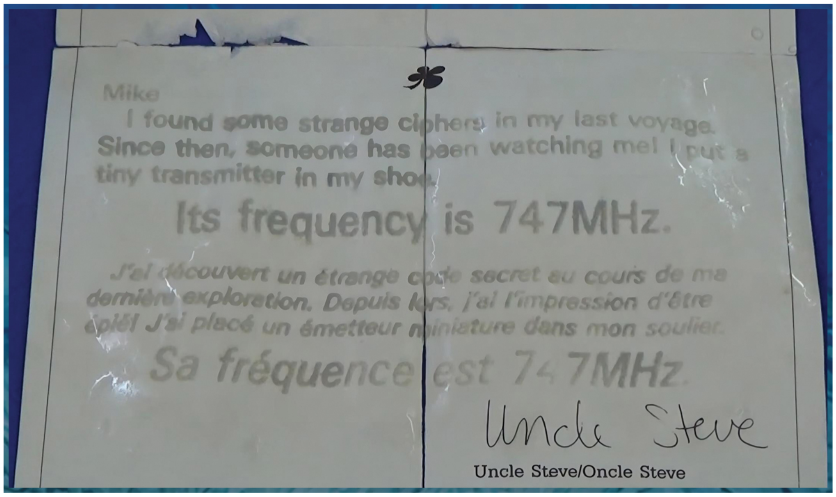
Wielding water as a tool is a common feature in a multitude of games, from the F.L.U.D.D. in Super Mario Sunshine and the recurring summon Leviathan in Final Fantasy, to the entire Water-type line in Pokémon. However, more impressive is water's function outside the digital realm to enhance your play sessions – and I'm not talking about remembering to drink your eight glasses a day! Ask anyone running an overclocked gaming PC, and they'll swear by the effectiveness of water-cooling kits in maintaining modest temperatures. There's also the potential for clever mixed-reality shenanigans, such as when Nintendo stuffed the boxes of the NES classic StarTropics with letters that had to be dunked in water in the physical world to reveal a code necessary to advance in the virtual one.

Sadly, there's a clan of "water wizards" who exist on both sides of the screen yet don't receive the respect they deserve: the noble firefighters. Because they rarely land playable roles, their few headlining appearances carry that much more impact. The SNES was home to dueling firefighter action-adventures, released months apart in 1995 but exclusive to different regions – Jaleco's The Ignition Factor braved the heat in the North American market, while Human Entertainment's The Firemen dispensed liquid justice in PAL territories. Mighty Switch Force! starlet Patricia Wagon even exchanged her police badge and sidearm for a high-powered water hose in the sequel to WayForward's block-flipping puzzle-platformer.

But upon further consideration, water is too awesome to be reduced to a mere tool, and therefore merely *knowing* water isn't enough. Thus we turn toward Dewy's Adventure on Wii, in which you command a living water droplet as it cycles through the states of matter to save its homeland. Fluidity on WiiWare and its 3DS eShop sequel Spin Cycle follow a similar template, only with less monster combat and more physics-based puzzle solving.

These titles mark the final stage of aquatic enlightenment, in which we accept water as our self reborn. It's perhaps the most literal interpretation of Bruce Lee's famous philosophy: "Be water, my friend."

– TONY



Mike

I found some strange ciphers in my last voyage. Since then, someone has been watching me! I put a tiny transmitter in my shoe.

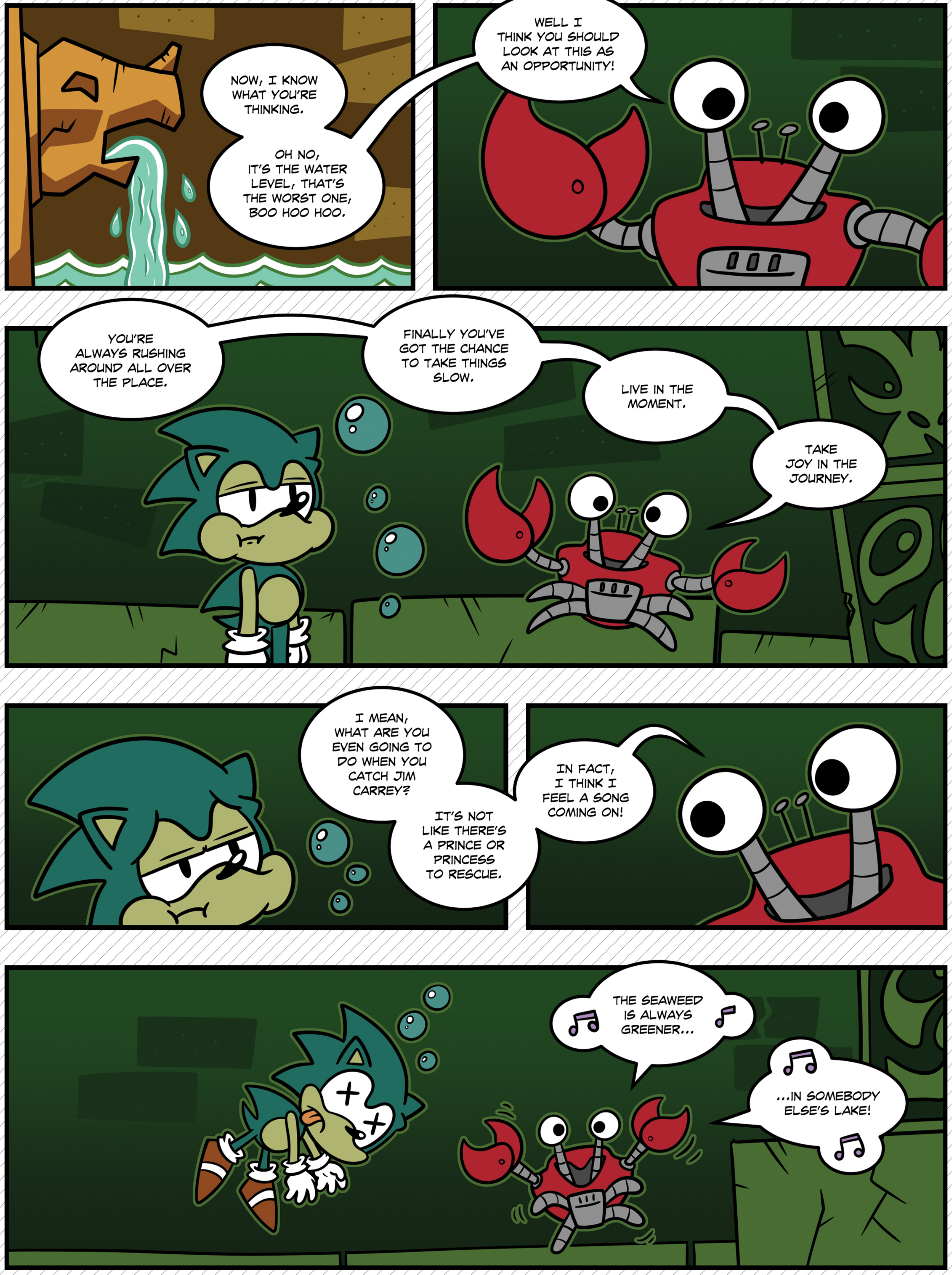
Its frequency is 747MHz.

J'ai découvert un étrange code secret au cours de ma dernière exploration. Depuis lors, j'ai l'impression d'être épié! J'ai placé un émetteur miniature dans mon soulier.

Sa fréquence est 747MHz.

Uncle Steve

Uncle Steve/Oncle Steve



BY MATTHEW LOFFHAGEN

ENDLESS OCEAN: LUMINOUS

Explore the sea floor with dozens of friends . . . or more!

THE OCEAN IS open again.

It does my nostalgic, Nintendo-fan heart so much good when one of the companies' many sleeping series is given a chance to wake up again. When a brand that hasn't had a new sequel in over a decade suddenly gets one, often announced out of nowhere, since so much time had passed that everyone had already stopped waiting for it to happen.

The Endless Ocean series fell firmly into that category, as it got back-to-back releases in the Wii era, in 2008 and then again in 2010 – and then it went dark. Sank down to the depths and skipped out on the whole Wii U generation. Nearly missed out on the Switch era too! But here it is, once again surfacing.

And it's so nice to see it again. Plenty of fun can be had in video games that are full of intense action. I'll always be up for saving a princess or battling some huge, towering, city-stomping monster. But every once in a while I really just want my game time to be chill. Fully relaxing. An absolute stress relief that eases me away from the worries of my day. And that's what Endless Ocean offers. The arrival of this new sequel is perfectly timed.

THE SCUBA-DIVING BASICS

Endless Ocean: Luminous, like its predecessors before it, casts you in the role of an underwater explorer. Suiting up in scuba gear, you'll dive down into the open ocean, swim around at your leisure and make discoveries – finding all kinds of interesting submerged landscapes like dark caves and sunken shipwrecks, and encountering all kinds of different species of sea creatures.

Luminous promises over 500 types of fish and eels and whales and other animals that live their lives beneath the waves – including some that have never been encountered in the wild in real life before. Most of the species you'll see are real, and living and swimming somewhere out in the world today – but Luminous takes a few liberties with reality too, and includes some extinct creatures, as well as a few entirely mythical beasts too. You may just come across the Loch Ness monster! Who knows?

When you discover a species you've never seen in your playthrough before, you can examine it to learn its name, its vital stats and access a paragraph or so of general information, kindly read aloud to you by a calm and welcoming voice. The game is genuinely educational! I might just have to give my kids a homeschool homework assignment of playing through this adventure and reporting back about new fish they've found.

NEVER SEE THE SAME SEA TWICE

One of the innovations the developers at Arika have come up with at some point in the last 14 years is a roguelike approach to underwater area design. Endless Ocean: Luminous presents an

SWITCH PUBLISHER: NINTENDO
DEVELOPER: ARIKA
RELEASE: MAY 2, 2024 RATING: E

unexplored area of ocean called “the Veiled Sea,” and it uniquely changes its layout every time you dive in to explore it. So there will never be that sense you sometimes get in games of “I’ve already seen all of this before!” – it’ll always change things up for you.

If you find yourself in the middle of a particular permutation of the Veiled Sea that you would like to revisit again in the future, though, you have that option too. Fully exploring the map will generate a special code that you can save to come back to that same configuration later on. You can also share that code with friends, who can plug it into their own copies of the game and be taken to your same sea!

MORE FUN WITH FRIENDS

Speaking of friends, the big new push for this Endless Ocean sequel is a massively expanded online multiplayer component. You’re more than welcome to keep the experience entirely to yourself, and explore the ocean totally solo – but if you’re willing to share the waters, you can swim alongside up to 29 other players at the same time!

It’s a really unique and interesting implementation, too. When you start a shared swim session, each player will begin their dive in a totally different, randomly selected part of the map. You’ll then get to swim around and come across the other players naturally, and when you find one, you can become “Dive Buddies” with them. That’ll add their name and location to a list, and from that point on you’ll be able to warp straight to their position from wherever you are.

Dive Buddies can swim together, or divide and conquer. If you go off on your own again and find a unique creature or treasure or point of interest that others would find interesting, you can tag them with emoji-like icons to alert the other players and let them know they might just want to see that cool thing with their own eyes too.

The multiplayer mode requires a Nintendo Switch Online subscription, but if you don’t already have one, a seven-day free trial is included with the purchase of this game.

BE YOURSELF!

With up to 30 different divers all sharing the same space together, you may want a way to make your avatar stand out from the crowd. Nintendo’s got you covered there too, as there is a whole array of character customization options! You can come up with your own unique color combination for your wetsuit, and there are a bunch of emotes you can buy that will let you express yourself differently too. A lot of these are funny, which should make for some great photos!

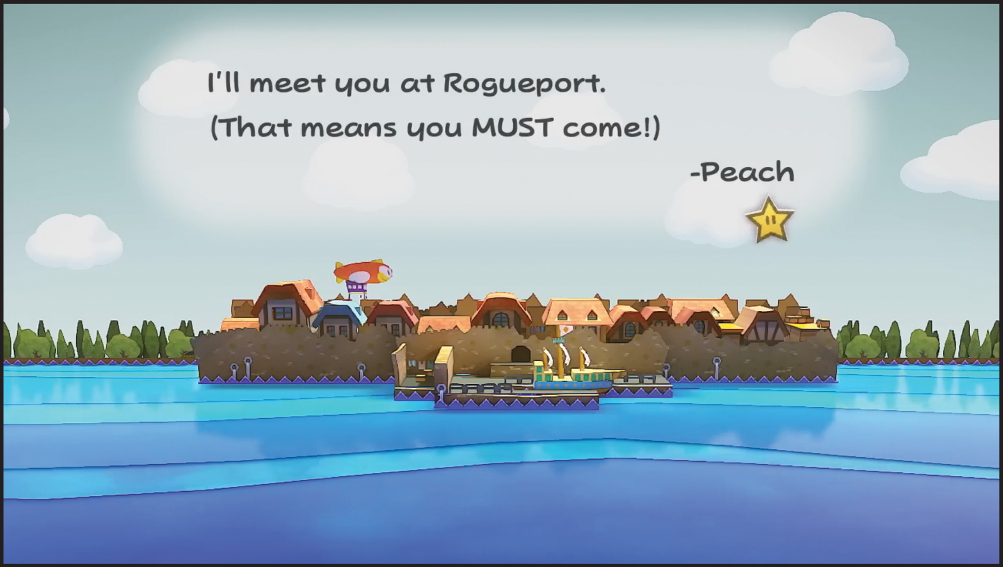
THE CORAL QUEST

While Nintendo has put a lot of this game’s marketing muscle into pushing the brand-new multiplayer mode, there is also a single-player story to experience in Luminous as well. Few details were shared before the game’s release, so I’ll have to report back in our full review next time with more information, but it looks like you’ll be tasked with saving “World Coral” around the globe. Earth’s oceans have unfortunately suffered a lot more damage in the 14 years since this series’ last sequel, so it’s nice that Nintendo looks to be taking the opporunity to draw attention to that ongoing ecological issue. Coral reefs are endangered all over the planet right now, and maybe learning more about that through playing this game will lead to more support for the scientists who are trying to reverse those trends. An admirable inclusion.

EVEN MORE TO SEE AND DO

Rounding out the experience of Endless Ocean: Luminous is a “Mystery Board” with 99 different achievements on it – clear one of the objectives listed and one piece of the puzzle hidden underneath will be uncovered. I could see shooting for completion of that board being another addictive addition here!

Combine that with the 500 different species to discover and the constantly shifting environment, and this has all the earmarks of a game that you’ll be able to go back to again and again. And that’s just perfect for me! I’ll dive in right from the start and have fun exploring together with friends and strangers online (maybe I’ll see you there?), but after all the shared swimming is done, I’ll still have this welcoming waterworld to escape to any time I just need to take a deep breath and chill out. **– LUCAS**



PAPER MARIO: THE THOUSAND-YEAR DOOR

An ode to Rogueport, the watery hub world of this adventure!

MARIO'S HUB WORLDS are always so happy.

He gets around in Super Mario 64 by exploring Princess Peach's pristine castle, and hopping into big, colorful paintings. That's happy.

He zooms around the world in Super Mario Odyssey in a cheerful, hat-shaped airship with a big balloon on top. That's happy too.

In Super Mario Sunshine, he gets to hang around in a tropical vacation town. In Super Mario Galaxy, he's on board a beautiful observatory floating in outer space. In Galaxy 2, he rides around on a spaceship that looks like his own head! Happy, happy and happy again.

. . . Things are not so happy in Paper Mario: The Thousand-Year Door.

One of the reasons this specific sequel in the Paper Mario saga has left such a lasting impression on its players is that it subverts expectations right from the start: It has no happy hub world. Instead, it offers you the run-down, crime-ridden, garbage-strewn streets of Rogueport.

It's a case of incredible contrast. This seaside town is seedy. Populated by scoundrels, bandits and mob bosses. It's a wretched hive of scum and villainy! And that's such a sharp swerve away from what we usually see in Mario's adventures.

Sure, these kinds of grimy environments can and do pop up in other games, but always later on – in worlds nearer to the end of those quests. Here, you arrive in Rogueport in Minute 1. It's where the story begins to unfold!

SWITCH PUBLISHER: NINTENDO DEVELOPER: INTELLIGENT SYS. RELEASE: MAY 23, 2024 RATING: E

What's more, it honestly does serve as this game's hub world, in that you keep returning to it over and over again. You'll go off to explore other areas – often brighter, more traditional areas like the first chapter's cheery Petal Meadows – but then you'll always come back to this port of ill repute.

Why? Well, because deep down underneath the modern-day town of Rogueport, there's an ancient city lying sleeping in the shadows: the place where Mario and his allies will find the titular Thousand-Year Door.

Again, it's a great contrast! This legendary stone temple and its ominous, huge door seems like the kind of place that would've been placed up on a mountain somewhere, on in the midst of an enchanted forest. But nope! It's buried a couple hundred feet under the Mario world's equivalent of that one neighborhood in your hometown that your parents always warned you not to go to.

Paper Mario: The Thousand-Year Door is such a special adventure. And we could've gone big with our coverage of its new Switch remake in this issue – it's going on sale just three weeks after Endless Ocean: Luminous, after all, and will surely eclipse that title's sales total almost immediately. It's going to be huge!

But, this time around, I didn't want to spoil any of its journey. I want you all to be able to play the best Paper Mario game as fresh as you possibly can, especially if it'll be your first time doing so! And so this final preview has dedicated itself only to praising the very first area of the game. Rogueport may become one of your favorite places in the Mario world – even if it's not a happy place to be! **– LUCAS**

REEL FISHING: DAYS OF SUMMER

Join some friends and cast your line one more time.

FOR THOSE OF you who prefer to do their outdoor activities safely indoors while sitting in front of the TV, Natsume is bringing a new installment of their Reel Fishing franchise to the Switch just in time for summer. But aside from its subtitle – Days of Summer – and a snippet of its storyline, there's not much we know about what kind of fishy fun is in store.

What we do know is that it's the story of a trio of best friends who decide to go on one last fishing trip before the end of summer, and find themselves exploring the wonders of nature. They have several odd encounters with a kind young stranger – could this fishing trip turn into a supernatural story?

One of the hallmarks of the series is crafting rods, reels and lures out of found materials, and making the correct combinations will make all the difference in landing a trophy lunker. There's a variety of different fish to catch and collect in 14 freshwater and saltwater sources, and you'll be able to show your catches off in the aquarium. The previous game also had a cooking mechanic that provided boosts in fishing and crafting skills to each of the other members of your friend group, and hopefully that will return as well.

I played Natsume's previous Reel Fishing release, Road Trip Adventure, and found it to be a fun and chill experience, with a great sense of humor woven throughout its story. However, if you're looking to get right into the angling action, this might not be your perfect catch.

Hopefully, Natsume will reveal more about this all-new installment and its features soon, especially since it's meant to be celebrating the franchise's 25th anniversary! **– REBECCA**

SWITCH PUBLISHER/DEVELOPER: NATSUME RELEASE: TBA 2024 RATING: RP

SCREENSHOTS TAKEN FROM **REEL FISHING: ROAD TRIP ADVENTURE**

THE SMURFS: VILLAGE PARTY

Sorry Gargamel, you're not invited!

HAVE YOU ALREADY seen all that Super Mario Party has to see? Have you already played each map in Mario Party Superstars more times than you can count? Do you wish both of those games had been a little more robust, with more content included, so repeated play sessions didn't feel quite so repetitive? Well, you're not alone!

Our family loves Mario Party, but it's begun to feel like drudgery to play either of the series' two Switch installments any more, since they're both so thin. Nintendo really dropped the ball by never offering DLC for either of them! Just a few more maps would've sold so well in an Expansion Pass.

But any time Nintendo fumbles, another developer is there to try to pick up their ball and run with it. Microids, a prolific dev studio and publisher based in Paris, has been trying to provide extra Party experiences for the last few years. Last year they presented Inspector Gadget: Mad Time Party. The year before that, it was Garfield Lasagna Party. The year before *that*, they made The Sisters: Party of the Year.

None of those games really moved the needle (we didn't cover any of them here in NF, I know), but in honor of their ongoing efforts, I do want to acknowledge their next effort that's coming soon. The Smurfs: Village Party is yet another Mario Party clone with a classic cartoon license applied to it. You can expect 50 unique multiplayer minigames, 19 different playable characters, several alternate outfits for those characters and even an Adventure Mode, in which you can explore the Smurfs' village.

It may not be Mario Party, but it is new and different! **– LUCAS**

SWITCH PUBLISHER: MICROIDS DEVELOPERS: BALIO STUDIO & VETASOFT RELEASE: JUNE 6, 2024 RATING: E

YS X: NORDICS

Set sail with Adol Christin . . . and try not to wreck the ship!

WHEN WE FIRST previewed this game three issues ago, it had just gone on sale in Japan and we were still awaiting word of any official localization plans. Well, that word has now arrived! Ys X: Nordics is on its way to the West, and its English-language version is planned to ship in the Fall.

Let's put a little extra emphasis on "ship" in that sentence, since sailing on a ship is a core component of this new sequel! It's a running gag in this franchise that Adol Christin, the hero, is constantly getting caught up in shipwrecks. (I think he's run more ships aground than Captain Olimar has crashed on the Pikmin planet, and that's saying something.) Since Ys X takes place a little earlier in the series' timeline, though, Adol is younger and hasn't quite built up his full reputation for being such a shoddy sailor. Maybe with skillful play of these new ship sequences, you can rewrite his history a bit and make him more successful on the open seas!

Early on in the adventure of Ys X, Adol and his allies will come across an old, abandoned sailing ship named the Sandras. They'll adopt the vessel, fix it up and make it their base of operations throughout the rest of the quest. (Though they also let Adol be the one at the wheel as they sail from place to place, which may be a questionable judgment call.)

Sailing on the Sandras serves a two-fold purpose. First, it's simply the way to move from one area to the next – like moving across a world map, but with more interactivity and immersion to maintain the real feeling of fully exploring the island chain in which this game's story takes place. Second, it lets the devs mix up combat with ship-to-ship battles!

At first it's as simple as can be: You get access to cannons and an infinite supply of cannonballs, and you can take potshots at nearby vessels as you breeze your way past them. A few on-target shots is all it takes to sink the smallest rival ships, and it can be a fun and arguably evil diversion to engage in, like when Link just walks into NPCs' homes and smashes all their clay pots.

But what if the pots fought back?! The ships in these seas will rally and swarm around the Sandras for more complex combat encounters in which you'll have to fight off multiple vessels at once. And by the lategame, you will have gained all sorts of extra weapons and upgrades for the Sandras and have to deal with elaborate boat-vs.-boat boss battles!

It's an element I'm truly excited about for this new sequel. I'll be ready to set sail this Fall for sure! **– LUCAS**

SWITCH PUBLISHER: NIS AMERICA
DEVELOPER: NIHON FALCOM
RELEASE: FALL 2024 RATING: RP

LUIGI'S MANSION 2 HD

How many millions will this one be able to move?

LUIGI'S MANSION HAS had a whole lot of visitors.

I don't think it's popular knowledge yet just how popular this series has become. Luigi's Mansion 3, which went on sale in 2019, has managed to sell over *14,000,000 copies* since then. That's insane! A truly wild number for a series that Nintendo *maybe* would've considered to be somewhere around their C-tier in terms of importance.

That sales total places Luigi's Mansion 3 as the #15 best-selling game for Nintendo throughout the whole Switch generation so far. It's sold more than both of the Switch Splatoon sequels. More than Super Mario Maker 2 and Minecraft, combined. More than Super Mario Bros. Wonder! (Though, granted, that one's only been on sale since last fall.)

So it makes a whole lot of sense why we're now getting Luigi's Mansion 2 HD — and also why it's shipping to store shelves in the summer, rather than being held back for Halloween. Nintendo's seen those incredible sales for this game's sequel rolling in, and they want to keep that momentum rolling as much as they can, as quickly as they can.

Being an HD upgrade of an older title rather than, say, a brand-new Luigi's Mansion 4, I don't expect that this game will set the sales charts on fire to quite as grand a degree. And yet, if even 10% of the players who purchased Luigi's Mansion 3 decide to also buy this one, it'll be more than a million seller itself in no time!

Personally, I'm looking forward to finally replaying this adventure. I remember thoroughly enjoying its original version, which launched on the 3DS in early 2013. I thought it was such a spectacular showcase of that system's special stereoscopic screen — the 3D effect was just perfectly suited to the slower pace of Luigi cautiously exploring haunted environments, and the fact that he was indoors so often meant there were so many elements of furniture and décor and just other *things* to be there in each scene, being displayed with extra visual depth.

This new Switch version won't have that 3D feature, of course. But the genuinely stunning high-definition upgrade the developers have applied is more than a worthy substitute. This game won't end up looking quite as good as Luigi's Mansion 3, but it seems like it's going to come close, which is a glorious achievement when bringing over a game originally meant to be seen on a three-inch screen.

Probably the biggest selling point for this game and the whole Mansion series, though, is lovable Luigi himself. He's just such a superstar in this series — his personality shines through in a way that no other Nintendo titles can match. In fact, Mario hasn't ever had a game that endears him to the players like this! There are just so many funny cutscenes pushing Luigi into so many comical situations that playing each Mansion game is like controlling an interactive Luigi cartoon. It's joyful, and I just know my kids are going to get a kick out of watching me play it.

They might even be inspired to play it themselves! It does have the four-player ScareScraper mode returning from the 3DS original . . . which isn't quite as robust as the eight-player version of the same mode that Luigi's Mansion 3 offers, but it should still suffice.

That's the recurring theme here: Mansion 2 HD is by most every metric just a little bit lesser of an experience than Mansion 3. But that game soared to such phenomenal heights that even if this follow-up only finds a fraction of its success, it will still be a massive hit. We'll see how the sales numbers look, starting this June! **— LUCAS**

SWITCH PUBLISHER: NINTENDO DEVELOPERS: NINTENDO & NEXT LEVEL GAMES RELEASE: JUNE 27, 2024 RATING: E

ROLLIN' RASCAL

Curiomatic is leveling up with this successfully Kickstarted Sonic-alike!

SONIC THE HEDGEHOG'S got a lot of spiritual successors.

We've covered three in this same issue! Back in the Download section, we presented our review of Freedom Planet 2, which seeks to recapture the spirit of the Blue Blur's old-school 2D sidescrollers. Also back in Download, we took a closer look at Penny's Big Breakaway – another Sonic-esque adventure created by the same team that made Sonic Mania.

And now, to round out the trio, we've got a brand-new game to put on your radar: Rollin' Rascal.

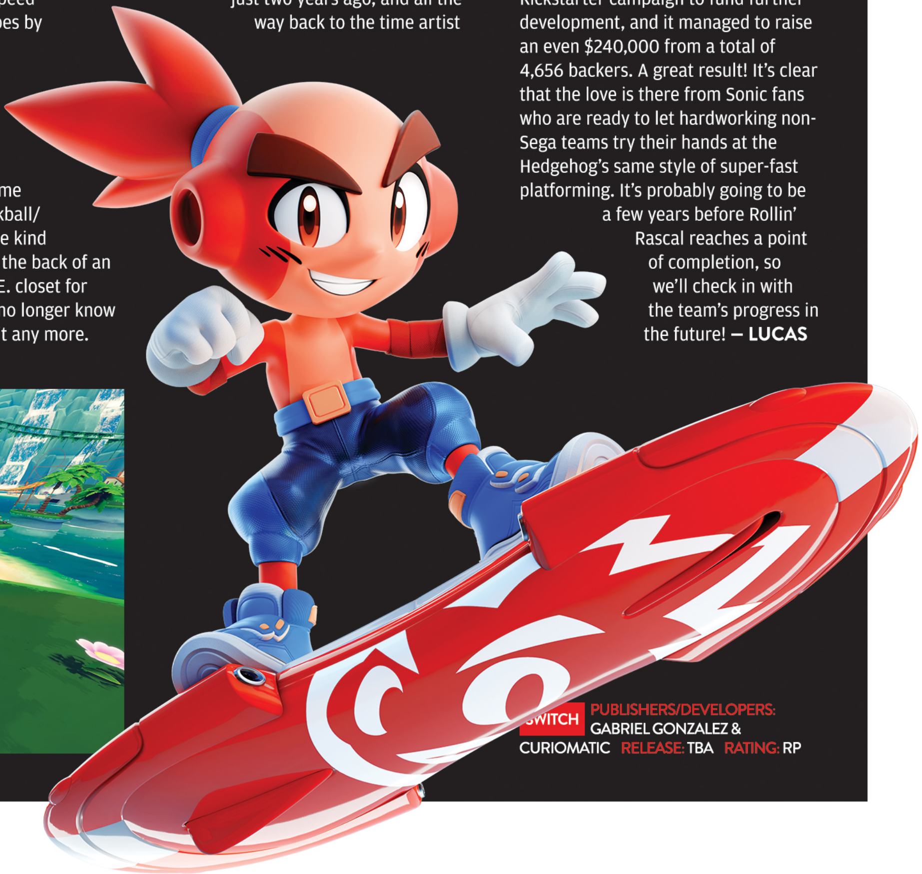
This new high-speed platformer is also the product of a former Sonic developer – though not an official one. Rascal dev Gabriel Gonzalez previously made the fan game Sonic GT, a fresh spin on 3D Sonic that earned effusive praise from the fandom four years ago. "This should be the future of 3D Sonic" was a common reaction.

Well, Sega's got their own teams doing their own things with the actual Sonic IP, but Gabriel has taken the unique ideas from his fan game and used them as the foundation to build a brand-new brand. Rollin' Rascal inherits Sonic GT's incredible sense of momentum in its movement, as well as a key gameplay mechanic of being able to pick up speed when rolling down slopes by turning into a ball.

Rascal, the hero, kind of is a ball even when in his more human form – just take a look at his head there. He's some kind of playground kickball/ medicine ball thing. The kind of ball that's stuffed in the back of an elementary school's P.E. closet for decades and that kids no longer know what to really do with it any more.

While hard to fully describe, Rascal is inarguably eye-catching – and his design comes to this game courtesy of Curiomatic! That team of artists has been featured in NF's pages several times in the past, from the time they helped make art for our Iwata tribute issue in 2015 to their Mother 3 tribute video that we featured in Community just two years ago, and all the way back to the time artist Omni Jacala tricked everyone into thinking Rayman was joining the cast of Smash. Full game development had always seemed like a natural next step for them, and sure enough, they've been partnering with Gabriel behind the scenes for the last few years to get Rollin' Rascal looking beautiful!

This game recently completed a Kickstarter campaign to fund further development, and it managed to raise an even $240,000 from a total of 4,656 backers. A great result! It's clear that the love is there from Sonic fans who are ready to let hardworking non-Sega teams try their hands at the Hedgehog's same style of super-fast platforming. It's probably going to be a few years before Rollin' Rascal reaches a point of completion, so we'll check in with the team's progress in the future! **– LUCAS**



SWITCH PUBLISHERS/DEVELOPERS: GABRIEL GONZALEZ & CURIOMATIC RELEASE: TBA RATING: RP

RPG MAKER WITH

If you love role-playing games, why not make your own?

I PLAY A lot of RPGs. I read about them often, and of course, I write about them!

Admittedly, I've never really considered making an RPG, though there's an entire franchise centered around that concept that's been around for more than 30 years: RPG Maker, also known as RPG Tsukūru in Japan.

Like the title suggests, this series of game creation software allows you to design your own RPG, complete with tools and assets, where you can draw out maps, create battle scenarios, script events and more, and then share your creations with fellow fans to enjoy.

Its latest installment, RPG Maker With, will arrive on Switch this Fall. So let's take a look back at this franchise and how it's evolved so far!

RPG Maker's roots can be traced back to the late 1980s/early 1990s in Japan, when ASCII Corporation (now known as ASCII Media Works, under Kadokawa's umbrella) began releasing software to make RPGs on Japanese personal computers.

The series eventually found its way to Microsoft operating systems for the first time with RPG Maker 95, which released in Japan in 1997. It would take a bit longer for the series to come West. (Officially, that is.)

By 2005, the series had localized versions on PlayStation and PC. The first RPG Maker entry to arrive West on a Nintendo console was RPG Maker Fes for the 3DS in 2017, though before that, several entries came out on GBA and DS in Japan.

With each new RPG Maker release, the series expands on what you can create and do. For example, RPG Maker Fes allowed players to make and download games portably, while RPG Tsukūru MV was the first title to employ JavaScript.

RPG Maker With is no exception, with its new asset sharing feature.

It will be the first entry on consoles where players can share either their complete game creations and/or in-progress work, including maps, databases and events, so that others can use them in their own projects, according to NIS America. It encourages collaboration among users, as players can craft assets from the ground up and then have them used in multiple projects.

If you're worried about making something from scratch right away, RPG Maker With will also have 128 pre-made characters and 130 monsters at launch, along with additional content to come post-launch.

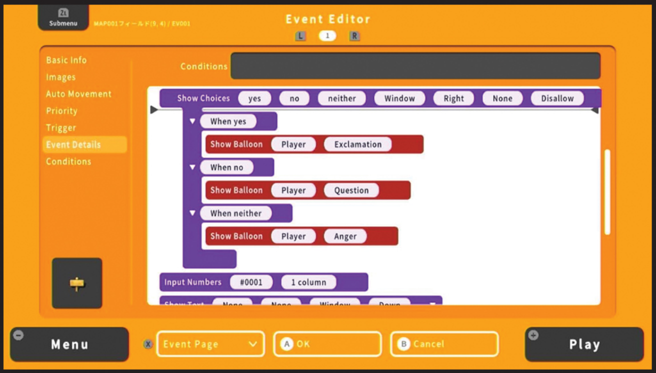
RPG Maker's software has led to the creation of several notable games since its inception. The first iteration of survival horror game Corpse Party, which released in 1996, was made using RPG Maker's tools. Now, it's spawned an entire franchise with a new entry, Corpse Party II: Darkness Distortion, coming this Fall.

2012 adventure game To the Moon also utilized RPG Maker and is a good example of how these tools can go beyond RPG mechanics, since that game leaned into its narrative and puzzle solving more than anything.

In 2020, psychological horror RPG Omori employed RPG Maker's programs. It featured turn-based combat and multiple choices and endings and garnered a lot of praise from critics and players alike.

Whether you've had experience making games, want to learn more about the development process and/or want an outlet to get those creative juices flowing, RPG Maker With may be worth checking out. See where your imagination takes you! **— MAGGIE**

SWITCH PUBLISHER: NIS AMERICA DEVELOPER: GOTCHA GOTCHA GAMES RELEASE: FALL 2024 RATING: RP



NEOSPRINT

Atari's reviving the nearly 50-year-old Sprint series!

IN DRIVING GAMES, there are three key components: maintaining your top speed, turning at the right times and wedging past the other racers. While your average racing title balances the relationship between those factors fairly evenly, NeoSprint goes all-in on the last two. With its zoomed-out, isometric camera angle and tiny on-screen cars, it's not even trying to make you feel fast. Instead, it's about taking turns at a near-constant pace, slowing down and speeding up at just the right time, muscling past your opponents and hitting jumps at just the right angle to keep from crashing.

That gets a lot more fun when there are eight cars on the track! Gritting your teeth and crunching past (or into!) your adversaries on these small streets makes for a highly physical, and often comical experience.

And for the Sprint series, that's always been the ticket. It first got started back in 1976, when trail-blazing, steering wheel-enabled multiplayer coin-op cabinets drew strangers together in brute force competition long before head-to-head fighting games even existed in arcades. Now, 48 years later, NeoSprint stays true to the spirit of its forebearers without skimping on modern bells and whistles.

Newly announced as bound for the Switch, it will be interesting to see how Nintendo fans take to this novel "spin" on the racing genre. Compared to Nintendo's own titles, NeoSprint has more in common with outliers like the 3DS StreetPass game Slot Car Rivals than it does big hits like F-Zero 99 or Mario Kart 8 Deluxe. With its multiple modes and track builder functionality, we'll see for ourselves if this humble continuation of a founding racing franchise can still place ahead of the competition when it launches later this year. **– JONATHAN**

SWITCH PUBLISHER: ATARI DEVELOPER: HEADLESS CHICKEN GAMES RELEASE: TBA 2024 RATING: RP

TOKYO PSYCHODEMIC

Solve cold cases in post-pandemic Japan.

ATTENDING EVENTS LIKE PAX East often provides opportunities to play games that you may not usually play, or even hear of otherwise. After going to PAX in March, I stumbled upon several neat games, most notably Tokyo Psychodemic.

This forensics simulation game from Gravity Game Arise stood out the most to me in terms of challenge and intrigue.

In Tokyo Psychodemic, you work for an underground detective agency with a team of colleagues to crack unsolved cases and determine the connections among them. The presentation bounces between a 2D visual novel style and live-action video clips.

I played the game's demo for around 30 minutes, and the story has a lot going on. In this version of Tokyo, a virus ravaged the city four years prior to the game, and it led to a new government being put in place. Add in evidence of cults, conspiracies and the supernatural, and you've got a lot of threads to unravel.

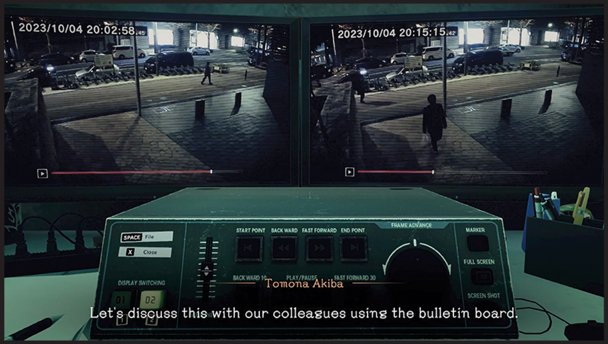
The game provides two main interfaces to solve its cases.

The first is the desk, where you can examine live-action footage, zoom in on crime scene photos, scour documents and listen to video chats from your colleagues, who are experts in specific fields. For example, I viewed a photo and found a lighter, which then led to speaking to one of the experts about flashpoint temperatures.

The second interface is your evidence board, where you make determinations on motives and suspects. It also can lead to break-throughs in cases. I got stuck at one point in the demo and decided to pin something to the board that I wasn't 100% sure about, and that allowed me to discover a new clue.

Tokyo Psychodemic requires a keen eye, and its investigations could become tedious, but after playing the PAX demo, I wanted more. That's no small feat when you're at a convention packed with other games! **– MAGGIE**

SWITCH PUBLISHERS/DEVELOPERS: GRAVITY GAME ARISE CO. & GRAVITY CO. RELEASE: MAY 30, 2024 RATING: M



TEENAGE MUTANT NINJA TURTLES: MUTANTS UNLEASHED

These Turtles may be water-wary, but they're always ready to dive into a fight!

NOW THIS IS a unique type of game that we don't tend to see very much any more – in that it serves as a story follow-up to a film. Specifically, last year's summer blockbuster Teenage Mutant Ninja Turtles: Mutant Mayhem!

This follow-up sets out to do what the Turtles do best – at least in video game form – which is take on the brawler genre. However, it's going to be a *3D* brawler, which, charitably speaking, has been a little more hit-and-miss for the lean green ninja team. Oh, and there's also a little "/platformer" after "3D brawler" in the press release. That's also been kind of hit-and-miss for the green machine. That's . . . that's always kinda shaky business for the guys.

We'll just have to wait and see how that goes, and if the folks at A Heartful of Games (who previously developed DreamWorks Dragons: Legends of The Nine Realms) are up to the task that's daunted such gaming giants as Konami and Ubisoft before them.

What we do know right now, though, is that the game seems to capture the unique visual style of the feature film, at least to some degree. There is also the promise of bringing the green teens' "infectious humor" to the small screen, in addition to their renowned combat skills.

Naturally, players will get the opportunity to experience life as one of the four brothers who know what is right. What's more, each one will have their own unique playstyle with which to traverse the city above the streets, as well as the sewers below.

And if you've got a friend who's willing to go halfsies on the pizza bill, then you can opt in for two-player local co-op action. That's right – if there's an opportunity for four ninja brothers ready to fight simultaneously (or online, for that matter), they're keeping those cards close to their chests . . . er, shells. Chest shells.

Wait, no, I think that's The Little Mermaid. Anyway . . .

As far as the story goes . . . well, spoilers for that big movie from last year that we were just telling you about! Read on at your own risk if you haven't watched it yet. Don't say we didn't warn you!

As far as the story goes, the Turtles have been accepted into society and are now attending the regular high school their friend April goes to as new students. But the fun times don't last for long before a new wave of mutants springs up and starts causing chaos across the Big Apple. (And it's not even 3 a.m.! Or maybe it is. We'll see.)

The Turtles four are due to arrive in Q4 of 2024. And if you can't wait that long before revisiting their world, the new show "Tales of the Teenage Mutant Ninja Turtles" is due to debut this Summer on Paramount+. It will star this same set of TMNT heroes too!
– DAVID

SWITCH PUBLISHER: OUTRIGHT GAMES DEVELOPER: A HEARTFUL OF GAMES RELEASE: LATE 2024 RATING: RP

SHADOWS OF THE REDACTED: REDACTED REMASTERED

Suda51 is taking a return trip to the underworld.

FAMED GAME DEVELOPER Suda51 got his start outside Japan with Killer7, a 2005 GameCube title that was co-written by Resident Evil co-creator Shinji Mikami. Since then, the two have only formally collaborated on one other game, an ill-fated 2011 EA release called Shadows of the, er, "Darned." (That's not its real name, folks!) In fact, almost nothing about the game is appropriate for this family-friendly magazine, to the point where Suda51 told us at PAX East that he's sorry in advance to any parents whose kids learn to curse from its cutscenes. And now that apology can extend to Switch owners too, as the game is finally coming to a Nintendo system.

It plays a lot like Resident Evil 4, but with a nonstop flurry of curveballs thrown in. Leading man Garcia Hotspur and his talking British skull-gun sidekick Johnson are constantly blasting caps at their unholy adversaries, but the exact methods to dispatch them are always in flux. And like in Metroid Prime 2: Echoes, you'll regularly struggle against being swallowed up by the darkness around you. But in "Darned," the main way to brighten your road is to shoot golden goat heads with a blast of light. And did we mention that unlocking gates requires you to feed baby-headed door knockers a variety of fruits? None of it makes sense, which is a big part of the charm.

This new "Hecka" Remastered edition adds a New Game+ mode and four new costumes for Garcia (Shirtless, Demon, Kurayami Dance and Eight Hearts). With a tentative price point of only $20, any action fans with a stomach for foul language and intense comedy-horror would do well to check it out. And anyone who played and enjoyed the No More Heroes games, of course! **— JONATHAN**

SWITCH PUBLISHER/DEVELOPER: GRASSHOPPER MANUFACTURE
RELEASE: TBA 2024 RATING: M

RUGRATS: ADVENTURES IN GAMELAND

A baby's gotta do what a baby's gotta do!

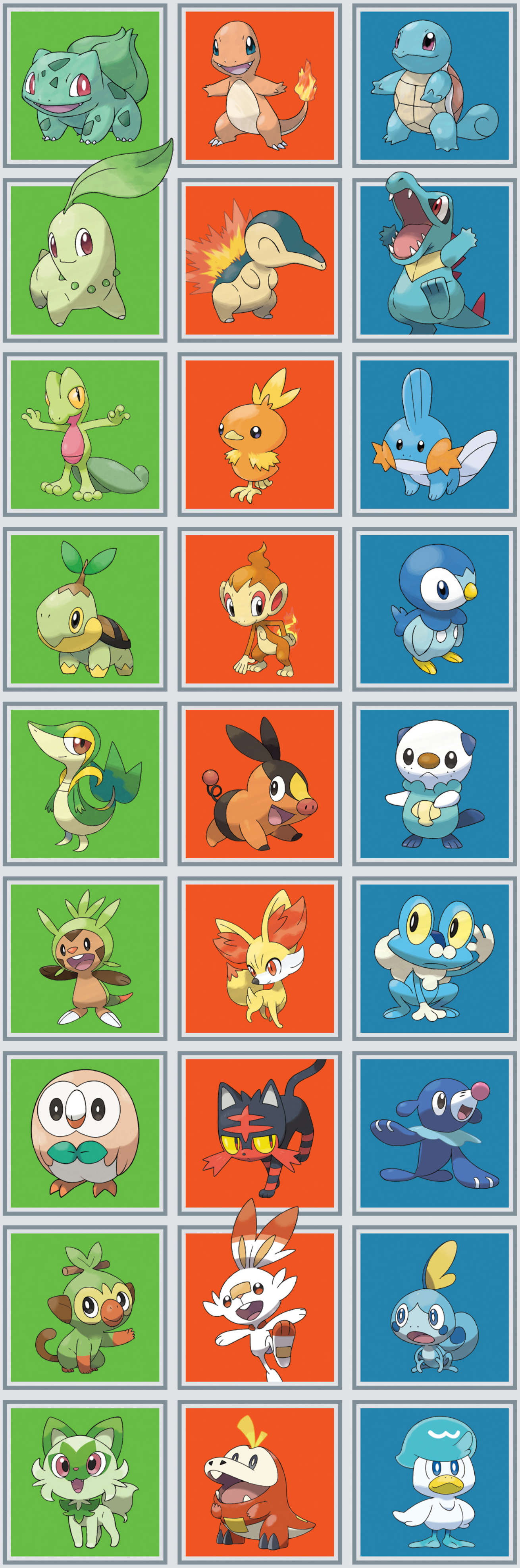
THE CLASSIC NICKELODEON show Rugrats was one of the first cartoons with an all-baby leading cast. So it makes sense that this new game based on the franchise feels a bit like "baby's first 2D platformer." It borrows heavily from Super Mario Bros. 2, with an occasional dash of Ufouria and Mario 3 thrown in to mix it up here and there. But it's much easier: These kids can't run, so everything happens at a gentle pace.

You can play as four babies: Tommy (the Mario of the bunch), Chucky (Tommy's best friend), and twins Phil and Lil (who take after Toad and Peach, respectively). They are incredibly small for some reason compared to the adults they sometimes interact with – much more so than in the show. An early interaction with Grandpa sleeping in his iconic recliner puts the kids up to maybe his ankle, even when they're standing straight up! To get by him, though, they have to crawl. It sounds like a small thing, but it does a lot to help the player feel like they truly have become two years old again.

From there, you get up to a lot of standard Mario 2 antics: jumping on enemies, digging in sand and finding keys to unlock doors. The demo at PAX East culminated in a boss fight with a larger, meaner-looking baby who battled like Bowser at the end of Mario 3, with a little Wart thrown in for good measure.

With the promise of both HD and 8-bit visual modes, there's a lot here to make fans of the Rugrats brand smile. Just don't go in expecting anything too complex. This is a simple, by-the-numbers retro romp. **— JONATHAN**

SWITCH PUBLISHER: LIMITED RUN GAMES DEVELOPERS: THE MIX GAMES & WALLRIDE RELEASE: AUGUST 16, 2024 RATING: E



POKÉMON LEGENDS: Z-A

Let's predict the First Partners!

DETAILS REMAIN SCARCE for the upcoming sequel to Pokémon Legends: Arceus, as no further official information has been shared by The Pokémon Company since its reveal at the end of February. But that won't stop us from trying to guess what those details might be!

Thanks to the precedents already set by Pokémon Legends: Arceus, we can go ahead and engage in some informed speculation about what this second installment in the Legends series may contain. One thought exercise that's already available? Guessing the First Partner Pokémon! Because while most mainline Pokémon games present brand-new trios of creatures that nobody could predict ahead of time, Legends: Arceus instead revisited three older First Partners and remixed them a bit by giving each one a new final evolution. Rowlet, Cyndaquil and Oshawott were the three Starters who starred in that game.

. . . So we can safely eliminate them from consideration for the sequel right away, wouldn't you say? Game Freak wouldn't use those three for the Hisui region and then use them again just three years later for our return trip to Kalos. They're out of the running.

Also easy to cross off the list of possibilities? The most recent trio, from Scarlet & Violet. Sprigatito, Fuecoco and Quaxly may be tapped for an encore appearance in a future Legends game (if this sub-series keeps on getting more and more sequels), but for now they're too new. They're out too.

Next on the chopping block: the original Kalos trio of Chespin, Fennekin and Froakie. I like them all, but since Legends: Z-A is set in Kalos, it likely won't reuse prior Kalos Starters, the same way Legends: Arceus avoided reusing Sinnoh Starters since it took place in ancient Sinnoh. We're sure to get a set of three that will all be new to Kalos.

. . . Now the cuts get trickier, but I think the Gen I and Gen III trios – Bulbasaur, Charmander, Squirtle, Treecko, Torchic and Mudkip – will all not be selected here. And I'll tell you why! Pokémon Legends: Z-A is set to feature the return of Mega Evolution. And, of all 27 First Partners seen here, those six are the only ones who already have Mega Evolved forms. (Charizard has two!) I think that, if Game Freak is spotlighting Mega Evolution again after it was shoved aside for several years, they'll give us a trio of potential Partners who will each eventually be able to access brand-new, never-before-seen Mega Evolutions of their own!

In fact, that might replace the type-changed, region-specific alternate third evolutions we saw in Hisui. I can see it working either way, really: Old Partners who evolve into new Kalosian forms of their final evolutions, or old Partners who evolve the same way they always have, but then evolve *again* into new Mega Evolutions.

And, if that's the case, Gen VIII's Grookey, Scorbunny and Sobble might be out. They don't have Megas, but they do have Gigantamax forms, which are somewhat similar. (And they're still fairly new too.)

OK, so who are we left with? For Grass, we've got Chikorita, Turtwig and Snivy. For the Fire rep, there's Chimchar, Tepig and Litten. And lastly, for Water, my logic says Totodile, Piplup and Popplio are still in play. If I were to hand-pick a set of three from those options, I'd choose Snivy, Chimchar and Popplio – I can picture Mega Serperior, Mega Infernape and Mega Primarina in my mind's eye easier than the others!

Will I be right? Probably not! But hopefully my process of elimination here has helped you better process your own thoughts! **– LUCAS**

SWITCH PUBLISHERS: NINTENDO & THE POKÉMON COMPANY
DEVELOPER: GAME FREAK RELEASE: TBA 2025 RATING: RP

THE LEGEND OF ZELDA: THE WIND WAKER HD

Will Toon Link set sail once more before the sun sets on the Switch?

I SAW IT said again this morning.

Another member of one of the Nintendo fan Facebook accounts I follow posted that he's been holding off on redeeming one of his Switch Game Vouchers because he's still waiting to use it on Wind Waker HD. He's positive that the instant he loses his patience and cashes it in for some other game, Nintendo will then finally reveal that it's actually real.

But at this point? I'm not so sure.

The Legend of Zelda: The Wind Waker was first released back in 2003 for the Nintendo GameCube. It was infamously reviled after its reveal, as its shockingly cartoonish art style stood in such stark contrast to the darker, more mature tone the main series had been building toward in its preceding two titles, Ocarina of Time and Majora's Mask. But most players who gave it a chance ended up falling in love with the final product, as the cel shading was simply a different kind of coat of paint applied to another epic Legend of Zelda adventure.

A decade later, The Wind Waker was ported to the Wii U. Its graphics got a lot of attention again, as this time a shiny, high-definition upgrade had been applied, and even more players found the fun in sailing the open seas far above the sunken old kingdom of Hyrule. (Not too many more, of course – the Wii U didn't have all that many players total.)

Which brings us to the Switch. When Nintendo launched its still-newest home console over seven years ago, and when it quickly became apparent that it was going to be far more successful sales-wise than the Wii U ever was, the parade of first-party ports began.

Mario Kart 8. Hyrule Warriors. Tropical Freeze and Treasure Tracker. New Super Mario Bros. U, Pikmin 3 and Super Mario 3D World! So many of Nintendo's Wii U titles made the switch to the Switch – especially in the early years of the system – that it began to feel absolutely inevitable that The Wind Waker HD would ultimately join them. I mean, it just makes sense! It's *right there*, ready and waiting to be ported over again. The high-def boost to the visuals was already done years ago. It doesn't even need much more to be done, if anything at all!

Those kinds of entirely reasonable arguments for why this game must be Switch-bound have been being made for over seven years now. So . . . uh, where is it?

If Wind Waker HD on Switch was such a home run, then why has it never actually bubbled up to the surface? At this point it's just the rumor that won't die. It's popped up in fake leaks and bogus insiders' "trust me, I know a guy" social media posts for the better part of a decade. It's a rumor that clearly never originated with any real inner insight into Nintendo's release plans, and was instead born and has persisted since 2017 entirely on the strength of "But wouldn't it just make sense to do?"

Time's running out now. We're in the Switch endgame, heading toward the reveal of Nintendo's next generation fast. So if The Wind Waker on Switch is going to be real – if it ever had a chance to be – then it'll need to finally make its long-overdue appearance very, *very* soon. And I hope it does! I hope it gets announced at last, and proves all those "insiders" right. I'll endure a few groan-worthy I-told-you-sos from people who never really knew anything at all in order to revisit this adventure. Wake up Wind Waker, Nintendo! **— LUCAS**

THE LEGEND OF ZELDA: TWILIGHT PRINCESS HD

Might Nintendo revive two 3D Zeldas together?

HAND IN HAND with the years of rumors swirling around The Wind Waker have been an equal number of whispers suggesting Twilight Princess could join it on the Switch. In fact, of the two, this one has often seemed to be even more plausible!

Consider that The Wind Waker has been sold in only two forms before, but Twilight Princess has had three: It launched as a swan song adventure for the GameCube just as the Wii stepped into the spotlight, pulled double duty as a Day 1 launch game for that newer system and then also got its own HD encore on the Wii U during that machine's short life span. It went back-to-back-to-back, three Big N gens in a row. But it still hasn't extended that streak to four!

Now, admittedly, the timing would not have been quite right if Nintendo had ported it over in the earliest days of the Switch. Twilight Princess HD hit the Wii U late, going on sale there in March 2016, only one year before the Switch went on sale itself. Not enough time had passed to port it again back then.

But now? The Switch launch was over seven years ago and TPHD is more than eight years old – that's long enough to once again let it out of the Nintendo Vault.

I'm making arguments here that, again, probably few reading this would disagree with. So the question once again doesn't need to be "Should it happen?", but rather, "Will it?" And, as with Wind Waker, I'm not so sure.

Plenty of people have suggested over the years that both Wind Waker and Twilight Princess should be ported to Switch together. To be sold as a two-pack! And at this point, they might need to be if they're coming at all, because not enough time is left to announce just one, wait for it to launch, then reset and do another cycle for the second. I wouldn't mind one more run around as Wolf Link, so let's hope this one's true too! **– LUCAS**

METROID PRIME 2 & 3 REMASTERED

Will the second and third Primes precede the fourth?

"METROID PRIME 4." Nintendo's been dangling that carrot in front of our noses for nearly seven years now, ever since it was first revealed at E3 2017.

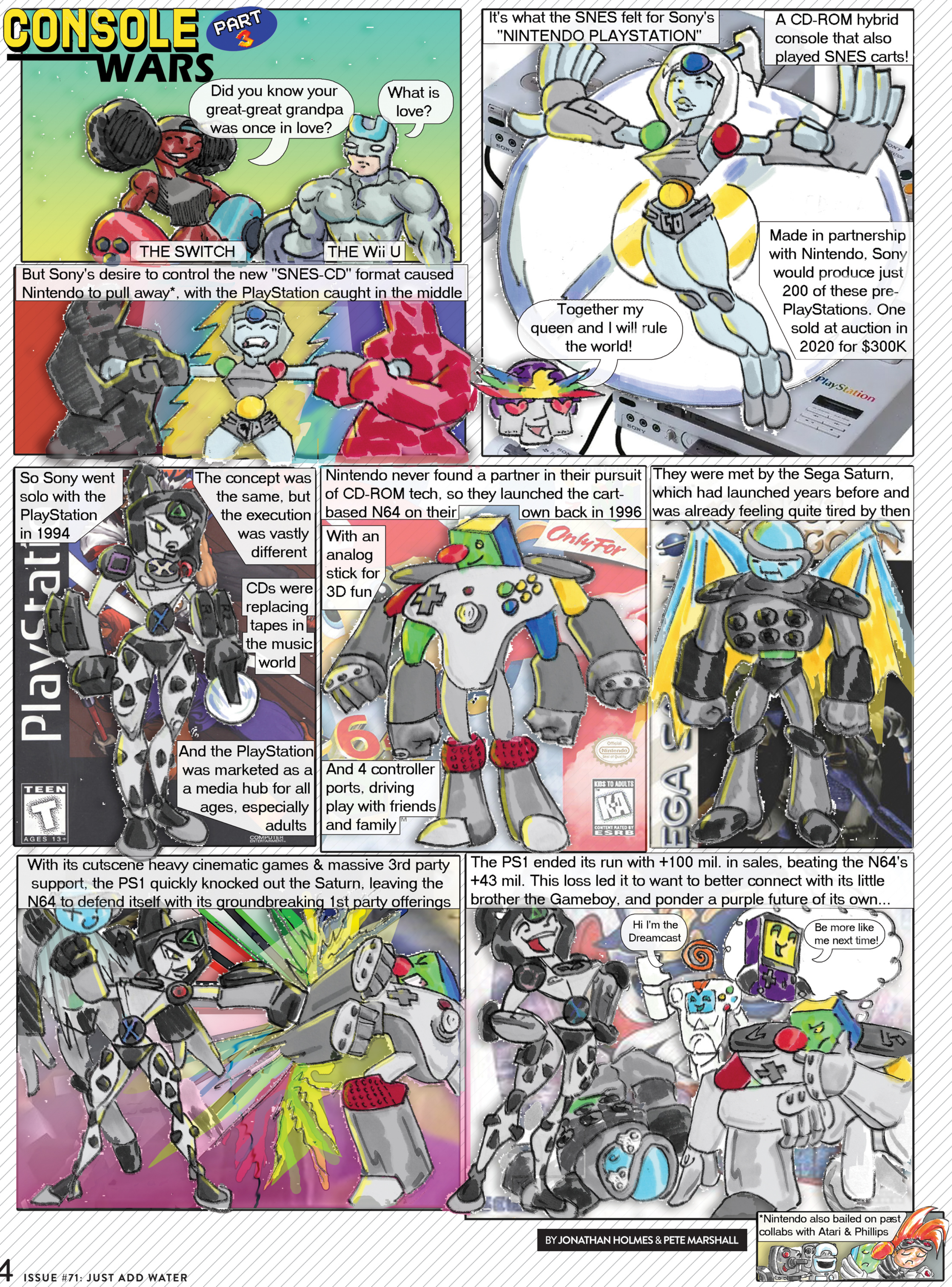
That's a long time to wait for a single update! But the only official news we've had since then came in January 2019, when Nintendo announced that development was . . . not going well. So they were restarting the whole production cycle from scratch!

Even that news was over half a decade ago now, and Metroid fans would surely be about to panic at this point . . . were it not for the blessed arrival of Metroid Prime Remastered. A sensational visual overhaul of Samus' first Prime adventure that shadowdropped its way onto the Switch early last year, it was a more-than-welcome drink of nerve-calming water after such a long time spent trudging through The Desert of Waiting Out Prime 4's Delayed Development.

Because it looked so good! It provided proof that the dev team at Retro Studios still knew their stuff, and Prime 4 was in good hands, even if it was taking forever to materialize.

But the question that's popped up since Remastered's release is simple: What about Prime 2 and 3? Will they also be getting the same fabulously upgraded visuals that Prime 1 got? If not, could they get just a couple of simpler ports to the Switch, like Mario's contemporary titles did through Super Mario 3D All-Stars? And, with either option, would they arrive before Prime 4, so players could replay the full story in chronological order? Some rumors have popped up in support of all those possibilities.

Will any of these turn out to be true? Or are they all just wishful thinking? Well, we've only ever run this Rumors section once before, and all of those games ended up being real eventually . . . **– LUCAS**


CONSOLE WARS
PART 3
Did you know your great-great grandpa was once in love?
What is love?
THE SWITCH
THE Wii U
It's what the SNES felt for Sony's "NINTENDO PLAYSTATION"
A CD-ROM hybrid console that also played SNES carts!
Made in partnership with Nintendo, Sony would produce just 200 of these pre-PlayStations. One sold at auction in 2020 for $300K
But Sony's desire to control the new "SNES-CD" format caused Nintendo to pull away*, with the PlayStation caught in the middle
Together my queen and I will rule the world!
So Sony went solo with the PlayStation in 1994
The concept was the same, but the execution was vastly different
CDs were replacing tapes in the music world
And the PlayStation was marketed as a a media hub for all ages, especially adults
Nintendo never found a partner in their pursuit of CD-ROM tech, so they launched the cart-based N64 on their own back in 1996
With an analog stick for 3D fun
And 4 controller ports, driving play with friends and family
They were met by the Sega Saturn, which had launched years before and was already feeling quite tired by then
With its cutscene heavy cinematic games & massive 3rd party support, the PS1 quickly knocked out the Saturn, leaving the N64 to defend itself with its groundbreaking 1st party offerings
The PS1 ended its run with +100 mil. in sales, beating the N64's +43 mil. This loss led it to want to better connect with its little brother the Gameboy, and ponder a purple future of its own...
Hi I'm the Dreamcast
Be more like me next time!
*Nintendo also bailed on past collabs with Atari & Phillips
BY JONATHAN HOLMES & PETE MARSHALL

RETRO

NINTENDO'S ORIGINAL UNDERWATER WORLD

CLU CLU LAND
NES, 1985

You can't really tell by looking at it – everything's taking place on a blank black background that doesn't really offer much of a sense of place – but the scene seen in the above screen is all meant to be entirely underwater. This is Clu Clu Land, one of Nintendo's early arcade efforts that became one of the launch titles sold alongside the NES in 1985. It's a maze game, casting players in the role of Bubbles the Bubblefish, who must deftly dodge villainous sea urchins while spinning her way through every row and column in each single-screen labyrinth. And "spinning" is what your head will also do after you try to play Clu Clu Land for more than a few minutes, as its control mechanics are truly dizzying – Bubbles can't change direction of her own volition, but instead swims forward constantly, so you have to reach out with her left or right arm in order to catch a pole and swing her around into a different heading. It was hard to handle, which may be why this series sank so long ago. **— LUCAS**

IT'S NEW TO ME!

ENDLESS OCEAN: BLUE WORLD

A second splash back into the backlog before surfing toward the sequel.

NINE ISSUES AGO, we were focusing on open worlds as our magazine theme, and I took the opportunity to fill in a gap in my exploration résumé: I played the original Endless Ocean for the first time! I'd always been curious about the series, but had never taken the time to actually experience it. Little did I know we were only about a year away from a brand-new sequel!

Before launching into Luminous, though, I wanted to step back into the series' past one more time and play the second installment, Blue World. (Yes, I finally fired up the dusty copy the used game store gave me years ago when I first tried to buy the original!) I discovered a game with more depth, and more things to do.

The thing that most struck me about the first Endless Ocean game was how lackadaiscal it was about doing anything – it was so committed to being a casual exploration experience that its host character literally told you not to worry about going on any missions or achieving any objectives if you didn't feel like it. This second game takes the opposite approach, by centering its gameplay around a story that you find yourself right in the middle of from the very first minute.

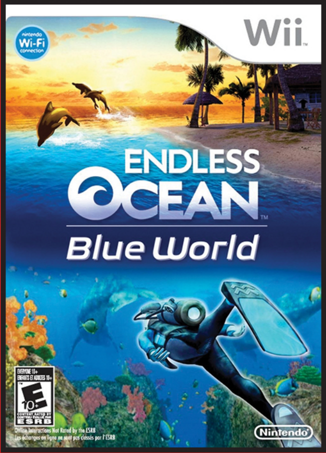
You play as a college student who's taking some time away from campus in order to do some fins-on field work, diving into the deep to try to solve the mystery of "the Song of Dragons." The prologue brings you face-to-face with a foreboding sunken castle, and then the narrative flashes back to an earlier point when your hero is just joining their dive team for the first time and getting to know their companions.

You meet characters like boat captain Jean-Eric, whose body can no longer handle diving, so he has to hire young folks to go into the water in his stead. His granddaughter, Oceana, has a curious pendant that's somehow tied into the main mystery – and she's also headstrong and reckless, getting herself into situations you'll have to save her from. There's GG, a brash young diver who's obsessed with finding treasure (and his personal appearance). It's a colorful cast, and gives this game more personality than the last one, where the only memorable characters were the fish.

Gameplaywise, Blue World adds extra elements too – like giving you a gun! (Kind of.) It's called the Pulsar, and it shoots out bursts of electricity that serve two purposes: They can pacify aggressive animals (like any hungry tiger sharks that try to make a meal out of Oceana), and they can also heal injuries to other sea creatures. How? Who knows! It's a video game. Just go with it.

Beyond swimming around with the same simple "point the Wii Remote the way you want to go" control scheme, discovering different species, exploring the underwater environments and making progress through the story, Blue World also offers a whole lot of collectables and unlockables. You can earn money by taking clients on dives to see specific animals, finding treasure on the sea floor and more, and then you can turn around and use those funds to upgrade your equipment or make your home base better. (My first purchase was a hammock, so my character could take lazy tropical naps, swaying in the sea breeze.)

It'll be interesting to see just how much influence this game will have on Luminous. I'm glad I took the time to finally play it, in any case! **– LUCAS**



ORIGINAL RELEASE: Wii, FEBRUARY 22, 2010 PUBLISHER: NINTENDO DEVELOPER: ARIKA

PLAYING IT TODAY

At this point anyone interested in an Endless Ocean experience should just dive right into the all-new sequel on the Switch – but if you want to go for total franchise completion, Blue World isn't too tough to track down. eBay has plenty of active listings for used copies as of this writing, with prices hovering around the $20 mark, but some going for as cheap as four or five bucks. (Like its predecessor, Blue World was a budget-priced game when it first went on sale back in 2010, so it's never been expensive to own.) Most used game shops should have a copy or two too – just make sure they give you the right disc!

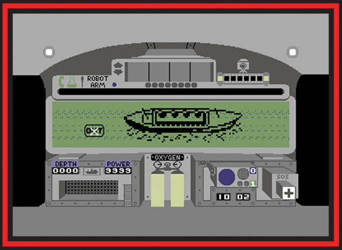
UNDERWATER COMMUNICATION

Bonus points for anyone who looked at that image above and could name the pictured peripheral on sight alone. That is the rare and little-used Wii Speak, an add-on microphone accessory for the Wii that enabled online voice chat . . . in a small handful of games. It first launched alongside Animal Crossing: City Folk in 2008, then NOA went for over an entire year before giving us another compatible title. Finally, in February 2010, Wii Speak got its second first-party game with Endless Ocean: Blue World. I missed out on the Wii Speak experience myself, but for those who did own both this microphone and the game, and who also had online friends who owned both as well, they could dive into the depths at the same time and talk to one another as if they were using radios built into their wetsuits. A few other third-party games also supported the Wii Speak, but Nintendo dropped it after Blue World.

ORIGINAL RELEASE:
FAMICOM DISK SYSTEM, JULY 24, 1987
PUBLISHER: GAKKEN
DEVELOPER: ACTIVISION

PLAYING IT TODAY

Titanic Mystery was never localized for the NES, nor has it ever been re-released. For that matter, because it exists as a port of another company's game, the licensing difficulties (coupled with the fact that it's a rather obscure game) mean that it probably never will be. At the time of this writing, there's no fan translation – so you'll need some basic Japanese reading comprehension to solve this mystery.



THE COMMODORE COUNTERPART

While Titanic Mystery was based on 1986's Titanic: The Recovery Mission for the Commodore 64, there were a lot of differences. The goal of the C64 game was to raise the Titanic from the depths, which was also the plot of the 1976 novel Raise the Titanic, as well as an episode of Pinky & The Brain. The adventure scenes also took place in a first-person view, which means there was no stylish swimsuit to look at!

LOST IN UNTRANSLATION

TITANIC MYSTERY: AOI NO SENRITSU

Swimming through a submerged shipwreck in a skimpy swimsuit.

THE WRECKAGE OF the Titanic is approximately 12,500 feet beneath the ocean surface. The amount of pressure at that depth is around 30 megapascals, or 6,000 pounds per square inch. To say that diving that far down in a simple swimsuit would be uncomfortable would be like saying a tube of toothpaste would be uncomfortable beneath a pneumatic press. But that's the premise of Titanic Mystery: Ao no Senritsu!

Released in 1987 for the Famicom Disk System, Titanic Mystery is an adaptation by Gakken of Titanic: The Recovery Mission for Commodore 64. You play as one of three women, but regardless of which you pick, the character you control always looks the same. Your goal is to explore the wreck of the Titanic and discover the truth behind why it sank. Just to make things more interesting, there's also a board of investors you need to appease so they'll continue to fund your expedition.

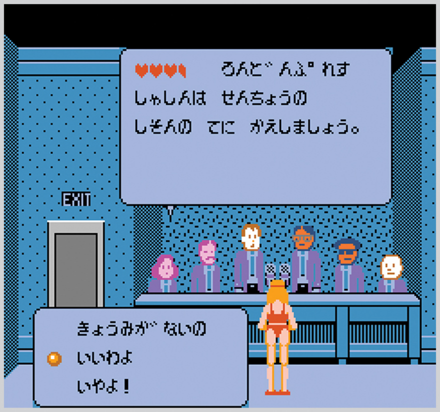
Mainly, you spend your time jumping into the water and plunging to unfathomable depths to swim around the sunken vessel. There are five decks stacked on top of each other, and while the game shows your character from a sidescrolling perspective, it plays more like a dungeon crawler. That choice of viewing angle actually makes it a bit difficult to navigate, as swimming to the side of the screen pivots the view 90 degrees, and it can be easy to lose track of the direction you're facing. You really have to pay attention to the compass on the HUD.

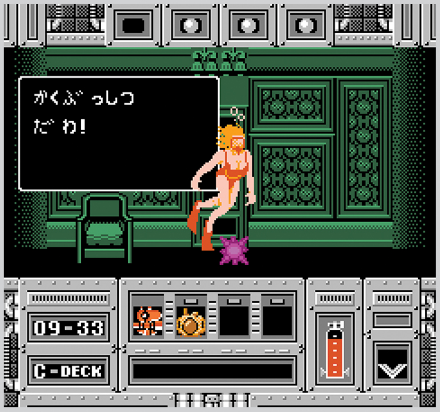
Titanic Mystery is a classic adventure game, so much of the time, it's about grabbing items and finding their use. This can be slicing open a teddy bear to get the treasure inside, cutting through a door lock or stuffing jewelry into your bathing suit to sell to your investors. You need to use your wits and your knowledge of adventure game logic to venture deeper and deeper into the ship.

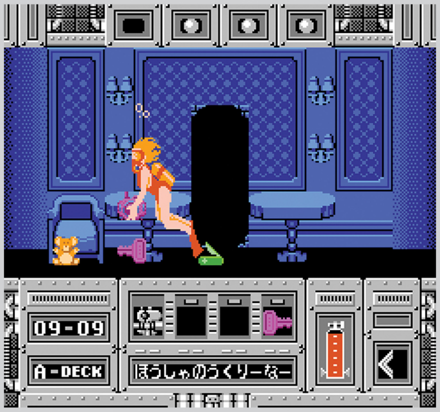
It can get rather cryptic. Even figuring out how to use an item on something in the environment takes some getting used to. But then there are moments like one early on that has you breaking a lock by bashing it with a safe. Later, you need to carry an empty battery into a specific room to trigger an earthquake that opens a pathway to another area. You have to figure all this out while your oxygen tank slowly depletes, threatening to leave you breathless if you're not careful.

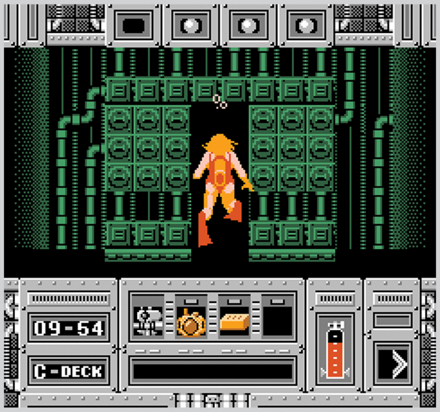
It's the type of puzzle where you'll want to break out your graph paper to create a map, since there isn't one in the game itself. Chances are, you'll have to start over at some point, whether it's because you accidentally triggered one of the "bad" endings, or because your investors pulled your funding and you ran out of time. When that happens, it's helpful to have a guide of all the places you have to visit to give yourself an advantage on later playthroughs.

Titanic Mystery can be an unforgiving and frustrating experience, but it's also a unique one. There really aren't enough games that have you solve a mystery on the ocean floor while wearing a one-piece! **— ZOEY**









WARP ZONE

What Nintendo Power was writing about way back when.

ONCE UPON A TIME, Star Wars movies were few and far between. For the better part of two whole decades, there were only three movies (we're not counting the Ewok ones), and that was that. Then one day, George Lucas decided he liked money! And next thing we know, Star Wars Episode I: Racer was on the cover of Nintendo Power's May 1999 issue — just in time to tie in with the new movie's release!

Other Fun Machine fare included highs, such as Pokémon Snap, and lows, such as Superman (better known now as "Superman 64"), plus lots of stuff in-between, like All-Star Baseball 2000, Shadowgate 64 (which shared poster chores with Harrier 2001), Ken Griffey Jr.'s Slugfest, All-Star Tennis '99, Bust-a-Move '99 and Airboardin' USA. Portable Power got a bit of shine as well, with Conker's Pocket Tales, Super Mario Bros. Deluxe, The Rugrats Movie, Caesars Palace II, Top Gear Pocket, Prince of Persia, The Chessmaster, NHL Blades of Steel '99 and Monopoly, plus four new colors of Game Boy Color: Berry, Kiwi, Teal and Dandelion!

Speaking of the new Game Boy Colors, a contest was held in which entrants would pair their favorite of the new colors with a game, and 25 winners would receive their choice pair!

Fun thing: In this issue's Now Playing, alongside many of the titles named above, they reviewed the original Super Smash Bros. It only got a 7.7! All-Star Baseball 2000 and Super Mario Bros. Deluxe both rated higher, at 8.0 and 8.3, respectively.

This month's Player's Poll focused on All-Star Tennis '99: The winner got a trip to the U.S. Open.

Speaking of winners, the winners of the 1998 Nintendo Power Awards were announced, and the winners were . . . The Legend of Zelda: Ocarina of Time! No, really. They even gave it the "Golden Broom Prize" for sweeping the awards, but were keen to point out that there *were* other winners (in categories Zelda didn't qualify for, granted).

Speaking of games that aren't Zelda, elsewhere was Nintendo Power's guide to E3, which highlighted the latest and greatest from the show floor that year. Rare's Donkey Kong 64 and Perfect Dark helped kick things off, with other highlights including StarCraft, Jet Force Gemini, Pokémon Stadium, Mario Golf, Resident Evil 2, WCW Mayhem, Mortal Kombat: Special Forces, Blitz 2000, Gauntlet: Legends, Hydro Thunder, Paperboy 3D, WWF Attitude, The New Adventures of Batman, Rayman 2, Toy Story 2, Spider-Man and just so, *so* much more than I have room for here. And Pak Watch was more of that, plus a behind-the-scenes with Mr. Miyamoto at the Game Developers Conference.

Pokémon Snap took the June cover, and was joined by more Ken Griffey Jr.'s Slugfest, A Bug's Life, more Star Wars Episode I: Racer (sharing the poster with 3DO's Army Men: Sarge's Heroes), WWF Attitude, V-Rally: Edition '99, Monaco Grand Prix and World Driver Championship for N64. GBC got more Conker, R-Type DX and All-Star Baseball.

Player's Poll winners got to go on a real photo safari in Disney's Animal Kingdom, thanks to Pokémon Snap, and Nintendo Power scored a slam-dunk feature when they visited Left Field to check out Kobe Bryant in NBA Courtside 2 and Excitebike 64. Plus, Power Players packing 'pinions could partake in the Power Panel, helping make our (then) favorite magazine even greater!

Wrapping things up in Pak Watch, we got to read about Mickey Mouse going 3D, Paper Mario (then called "Super Mario Adventure"), Kirby 64, NFL Quarterback Club 2000 and the Prime Primate's return in Donkey Kong 64! **— DAVID**

ISSUE #120: MAY 1999

ISSUE #121: JUNE 1999

VARIANT COVERS

As they'd done to promote Star Wars once before (the Shadows of the Empire issue also had four cover possibilities), so too did NP give the Episode I: Racer edition the same quadrupled treatment!

Super Mario Adventure

INTERVIEW

DATE & PLACE OF BIRTH
April 16, 1995, in Seattle, Washington

FAVORITE FOOD
Sundubu Jjigae

CURRENT POSITION IN THE INDUSTRY
Studio Head at Aggro Crab

BEST KNOWN FOR
Making Going Under :)

NICK KAMAN

A deep dive into the mind and motivations of the man who led the dev team for Another Crab's Treasure!

INTERVIEW BY JONATHAN HOLMES

NF: What were some of the games that led you to fall in love with gaming, and are they the same games that inspired you to become a developer yourself?
NICK KAMAN: MARIO. A lot of Mario. Super boring answer sorry. Donkey Kong 64, Pokémon Snap, Melee. I was the biggest Nintendo kid, I might have rocked the Triforce T-shirt and cargo shorts at one point.

And then when I discovered indie games it was stuff like The Binding of Isaac, The Beginner's Guide and Sokpop Collective where I developed more of a taste from a dev standpoint. It was exciting when I realized there were games where the perspective of the creator shines through!

How did you first get started in the industry, and how did your initial experiences as a game developer change your perception of what game making is all about?
I came up as a real dirtbag struggle indie — and by that I just mean I didn't come from AAA or any sort of industry background. Basically no formal developer or entrepreneurial experience, just YouTube tutorials and vibes to get to the point where I was doing game jams in high school and college. I'm privileged enough to have had a chance right after college to take risks, so me and a buddy went to the Game Developers Conference and just took whatever contract work we could find to cut our teeth on. We made a VR experience for PETA. Yeah, *that* PETA. From that stepping stone I worked on original projects until finally cofounding Aggro Crab with my college friend Caelan and landing a publishing deal for Going Under, and now Another Crab's Treasure.

I think I fell in love with the profession after that first GDC because I got to see a ton of sides of the industry and meet so many passionate devs. "What game making is all about" is a big topic, but I guess I'd say it's about the people. I get so much energy from the community of indie devs all taking their own approach to making the next great game. Everyone is figuring out their own solutions, but then we come together to share knowledge and lift others up. Indie dev is exciting because it's hard and there are no guarantees. Making a game at all is hard, releasing it is harder, and don't get me started on marketing. I wouldn't be anywhere without the community there to help me figure that all out.

Tell us the tale of your studio's name!
Aggro Crab? We just came up with it by trying to think of videogamey words. I think "Aggro" aptly describes our brash style of game design and, well, "brand" voice. Not only does it mean aggressive, but in games it means you've drawn something's attention . . . and that's what we try to do too? I dunno. The funny thing is the name "Another Crab's Treasure" actually predates Aggro Crab by a few years. It was a game I wanted to make in college but at the time was just a pipe dream — so when we were thinking of a name for the studio I had to sneak the word Crab in there! Now that we're actually making the game, it's a bit silly to hear both all the time.

Going Under, Aggro Crab's first title, was all about "exploring the ruins of cursed tech start-ups." Your new game, Another Crab's Treasure, is about being a crustacean combing the ocean floor for sparkling surprises. What is it about your studio that keeps you coming back to the theme of exploring new worlds lying right under our noses?
I think as a studio we're drawn to making games in mainstay genres with unexpected themes that-actually-make-sense-once-you-think-about-it. With Going Under we thought, "showing up at your boring tech job every day is kind of like a roguelike." And with Another Crab's Treasure, well, the ongoing pollution of our oceans kind of feels like the crumbling world of Dark Souls. The last thing we'd ever want to make is some generic medieval fantasy or sci-fi thing — our creative juices are squeezed way more readily from an offbeat premise.

What are some of the other movies, games or other media that inspired your work on Another Crab's Treasure? I get serious Mr. Limpet vibes from it so far.
Googles Mr. Limpet Uhhhhhh, wow, how have I not heard of this?

Anyway, yeah, the Zoomer version of this is like Moana or something. Remember the song "Shiny" with the big crab? I love that part. That's basically a Dark Souls boss.

But honestly a big inspiration and touchstone for us was Disney/Pixar movies. Those movies have very formulaic hero's journeys — coming-of-age types of stories with unlikely anthropomorphic heroes. It's the total opposite of what you usually find in Soulslikes, which have narratives that

YOU KNOW THE OLD SAYING: "ONE MAN'S TRASH IS . . . ANOTHER CRAB'S TREASURE!" THE OCEAN FLOOR IS OVERFLOWING WITH GARBAGE DISCARDED BY UNCARING HUMANS, AND NOW THE SEA CREATURES WHO MAKES THEIR HOMES THERE ARE BEING FORCED TO ADAPT TO AN EXTREMELY ECOLOGICALLY DAMAGED ENVIRONMENT.

center around environmental storytelling and esoteric lore. That's just never been our style. We want to tell a story that has a clear beginning, middle and end.

From games, it's a lot of N64 and GameCube stuff, and Souls games, obviously — we wanted to get across the juxtaposition of an innocent Banjo-Kazooie-esque mascot character who's stuck in this grim, decaying, Souls-like world. I mean, don't we all feel that way sometimes?

On the other side of the spectrum, are there any games that take place underwater, or have "water levels," that you didn't enjoy? If so, how have you tried to avoid following in their footsteps?
Here at Aggro Crab, we believe there's no such thing as a bad water level!

. . .

I mean, look, people don't like water levels because they replace your controls with clunky swimming mechanics. Our game is 99% underwater, so that's just the normal! The only really watery feeling in it is that you have a little swim that lets you glide temporarily. If anything, it's the out-of-water sections in our game that don't feel as good.

Making a game that's set in the ocean gives you a whole undersea world of creatures to potentially include in your game. Has feature (or in this case, creature) creep been an issue?
Yeah, it's a real problem. We have like almost 20 bosses, and a bunch more enemies. That's very genuinely too much content for a team of our size (11) to handle. But can you blame us? We just kept thinking of fun dudes we wanted you to fight. All we had to do was think of a sea creature and give it a silly piece of trash as a weapon. It practically designs itself.

There is definitely a lesson for next time on not biting off more than we can chew, but we're extremely proud of the game we ended up making.

You've also described Another Crab's Treasure as a Soulslike, but gosh darn it, your game is looking too cute to be that hard to pick up. How has your team gone about keeping true to the sub-genre while making something that's more inviting than most Soulslike games?
It's a hard game dude! I think people will be pleasantly surprised with the difficulty, which is obviously the main thing people expect from the genre. You WILL die in only a few hits if you aren't giving foes the proper respect. But there are a lot of steps we take to make it less punishing, without it being necessarily less challenging.

For one thing, as a hermit crab your main tool is blocking, so you can trade some Shell Health for a guaranteed defense. Sure you can dodge or parry too, but at least you can bide your time until you're confident.

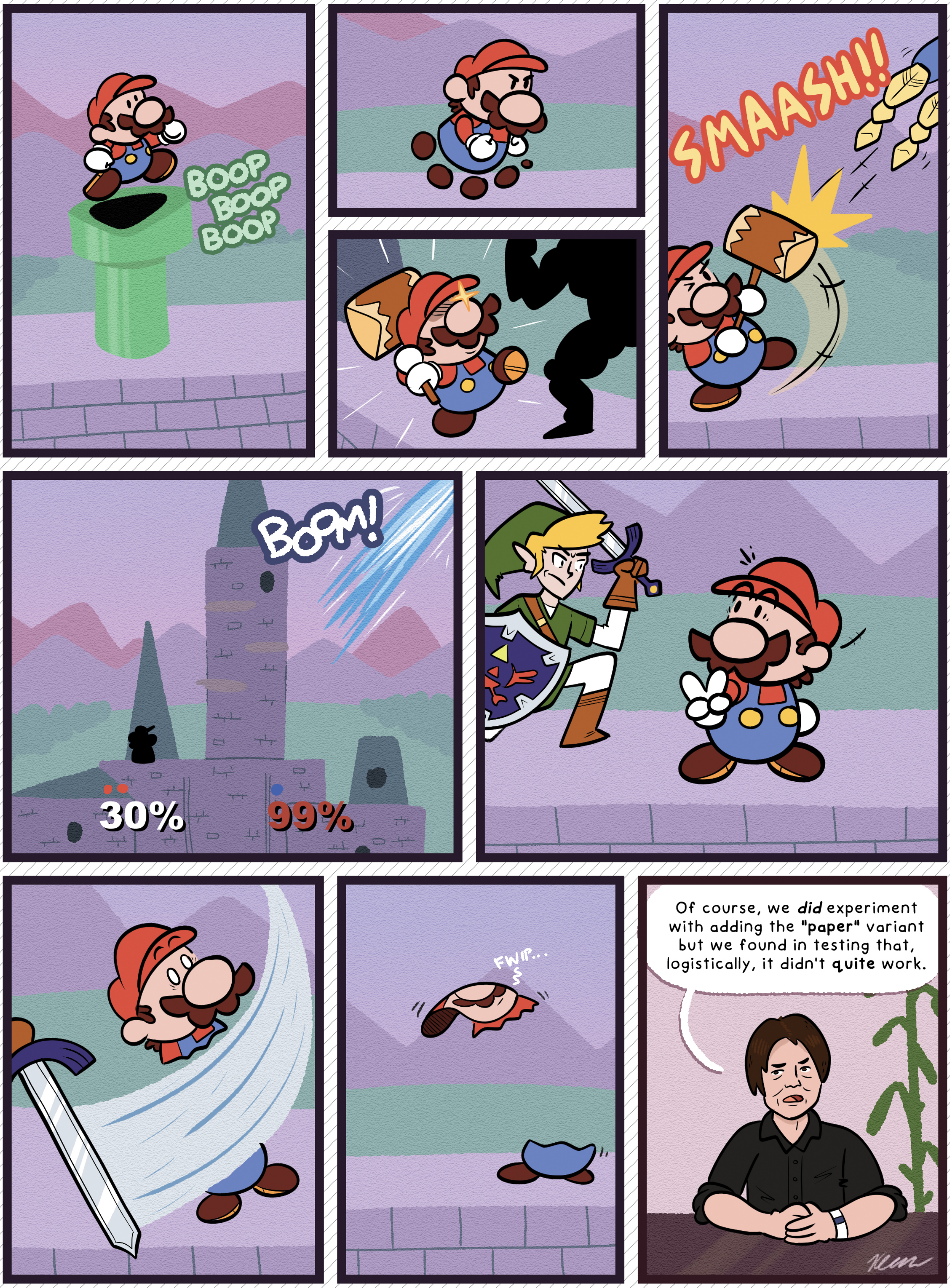
On top of that, we have a menu of assist settings designed to make the experience more forgiving. You can do things like increase dodge invincibility time or remove damage from falling off cliffs. None of this has an in-game effect on the validity of your playthrough, and you can turn them on and off at will. We realize with our game's cute aesthetic we're attracting a different audience, so we really want to meet them where they're at while still delivering a true Soulslike experience.

Any advice for people thinking of leading the indie dev life someday?
Man, things are kinda bleak now! At every step of the way in my career so far, I've felt like I got in the door just as it was closing. Publishing deals are drying up. Platform opportunities are too. Twitter and TikTok marketing aren't as reliable as they used to be. Even tools like Unity are having issues right now!

My point being, I'd have a hard time encouraging anyone to go indie right now, but the classic advice still holds true if you're gonna do it anyways: Make a lot of games and FINISH them. That's a very underlooked aspect. Find like-minded people to collaborate with who can cover the gaps in your skill set. Take care of your back and neck, and just generally try not to destroy your physical and mental well-being by overworking. Find investment, so you can gamble with other people's money. Remember none of this is real until you can do it sustainably, and your first game is not going to be the one that lets you do that.

Finally, if you were given unlimited time and money to make a game in any Nintendo franchise, which franchise would you pick and what would you do with it?
I think a 3D Wario game with Pizza Tower's sensibility for over-the-top action would go hard. That's my pragmatic "I actually think we'd do a good job at this" answer, lol.

ALL THAT TRASH GETS PUT TO GOOD USE BY OUR HERO CHARACTER, KRIL, THOUGH — HE WIELDS THINGS LIKE OLD FORKS AND KNIVES AS WEAPONS, WHILE WEARING DOZENS OF DIFFERENT KINDS OF REFUSE AS SUBSTITUTE SHELLS. THIN PLASTIC CUPS DON'T OFFER MUCH PROTECTION, THOUGH, SO HE'S ON A QUEST TO RECOVER HIS REAL SHELL!



BY JOHN-CHARLES HOLMES

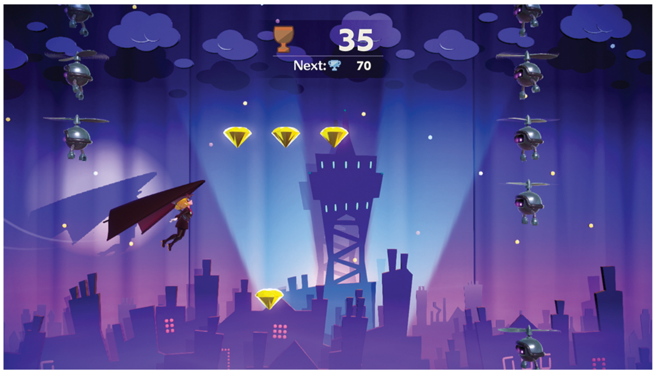
From a swashbuckling swordfighter to a diligent detective, from a rope-slingin' cowgirl to a pastry-baking patissiere, even a musical mermaid singing under the sea, this Princess is ready to take on any role! Read our full review of Princess Peach: Showtime! just ahead!

No One Upstages a Princess

PRINCESS PEACH: SHOWTIME!

I'VE NEVER BEEN very good at catching a baseball. I watch other people do it and it looks like the most natural thing in the world, but whenever I try, the lines just don't connect. It's taken me a long time to understand that this is exactly how a lot of people feel about most video games – and that's what makes Princess Peach: Showtime! so special. It appears to be made specifically to cater to those who have never been able to get the hang of traditional video games. If you happen to be one of those people, get ready, because for you, it's showtime!

Let me tell you about my daughter, Ellie. She's 7, and she's always struggled with traditional video games. Even stuff like Kirby that people say is "great for kids" has consistently proven to be too frustrating for her. But games like Big Brain Academy, Clubhouse Games and Nintendo Switch Sports she plays just fine. My wife is the same way. If we ever tried to play, for example, New Super Mario Bros. U together, she'd get incredibly frustrated in no time. Meanwhile, she's 100% completed Runner2 (a game where you don't have to directly control the character's movement), a feat that by most metrics is considerably more difficult. For both of them, moving a character or performing actions are fine on their own, but doing both at the same time becomes overwhelming. So as I watched them play this and not only have fun but also fully grasp the mechanics, it became clear that this was the game I'd been hoping someone would make for ages: a game simple enough for anyone to grasp, but with Nintendo's level of quality making it actually good.



The premise is simple: Princess Peach goes to a theater for some live entertainment, but upon her arrival, a dark witch named Grape takes over all of the plays. It's up to Peach and her new ribbon-themed companion Stella to defeat Grape's minions and return the theater to normal! You do this by becoming a part of the plays themselves, and each one includes a unique transformation to fit its theme. Every outfit comes with its own game mechanics, and you have to master them all to get to the end. Detective Peach solves mysteries, Swordfighter Peach swings a sword, Patissiere Peach makes cakes, and so on.

In the interest of being thorough for this review, I invited several of Ellie's friends over to try the game one by one to see what they thought. Each of them had different levels of gaming experience. Aurora is 7 and really into Minecraft and Animal Crossing, Cianna is 8 and only occasionally plays games, Josie is 8 and has never shown much interest in games at all, Bella is 6 and thinks Mario Kart is cool, and my son John is 10 and obsessed with games (just like his Dad), but has always struggled with mastering them. The adult players were Erica, Aurora's Mom, who has rarely touched a video game in her life, and my wife Karen. Interestingly enough, every single one of them faced their own unique struggles while playing.

Bella had a hard time keeping up with the dialogue, as it goes by kind of fast and there's no way to stop it from progressing automatically. Josie wrestled with the concept of foreground and background, as early in the game they tell you to go to a castle that can be seen in the background, so she kept trying to walk into the background instead of following the path ahead. Ellie struggled with some of the bosses that required slightly more advanced coordination to defeat. Erica had a hard time differentiating between when the game wanted her to move and when it was controlling Peach for her as part of a cinematic.

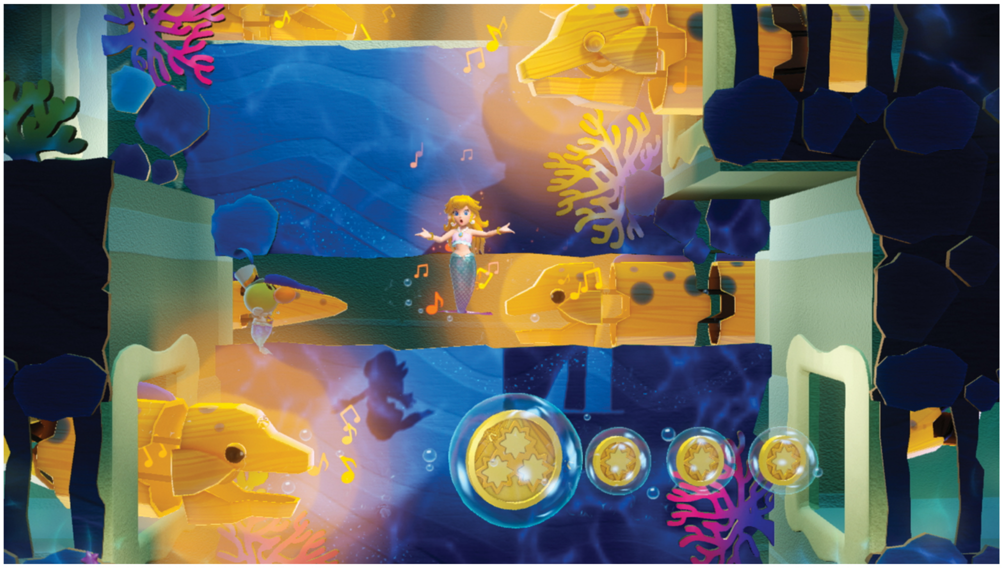
But to my amazement, every single one of them, adults included, was driven to keep going! No matter how difficult things got – which, let me tell you, is NOT how my kids normally handle challenge in video games. When asked about the difficulty, even though a few of them said it was pretty hard, none of them considered it a problem. For my wife and kids in particular, I had never seen anything quite like it. And yes, that includes my son John, who took a particular liking to the game's boss designs.

As for the game itself, it's nice. The visuals are pleasant, if a little inconsistent in terms of framerate and polish. But I was particularly taken aback by the music – it's serviceable, but falls well short of the memorable tunes both Broadway stage plays and Mario games are known for. Given how well the theater theme is handled everywhere else, that was a letdown.

What isn't a letdown, though, is the amount of fun stuff there is to do. You can unlock new dresses and outfits for Peach and Stella (the disco ball dress was my favorite) and there are plenty of secrets to discover in every stage, which does a great job of encouraging multiple playthroughs. There's even some neat post-game content, including a hide-and-seek minigame and the ability to decorate the theater itself!

As for me, a 40-something-year-old man, I had an unsurprisingly hard time staying engaged with it. It's exceedingly charming and often clever, but it's simple, arguably to a fault, and by the end I found myself frequently bored. But I'm not the target audience. Nitpicking this games' issues based on my perspective misses the point. Yes, some of the objectives can be weirdly opaque, and it would have been nice to see some harder difficulty modes, but for those who often feel left out by video games, it provides an opportunity to experience one that they can actually play, and no amount of technical flaws can undo the joy I saw those kids get from trying it out.

Titles like this are important. All too often games aimed at younger or less experienced players are vapid, effortless minigame collections, or barely functional platformers. This one was made with care, and I (and several kids I know) sincerely hope there's more like it to come. **– KRIS**



7.5

SWITCH PUBLISHER: NINTENDO
DEVELOPER: GOOD-FEEL
RATING: E

9.0

Vanillaware is Still Full of Flavor

UNICORN OVERLORD

NEVER CONTENT STAYING in the same genre for long, the developers at Vanillaware have launched their next entry into the tactical RPG canon with their latest title, Unicorn Overlord. While the game utilizes less of the overtly mature designs players have come to expect from the team, the same lavishly hand-drawn visuals are on full display here.

At first, Unicorn Overlord looks deceptively straightforward, with a familiar tale of lineage-motivated warfare and all the military-fantasy tropes – elves and Valkyries, shields and ballistae, you know the drill. However, there is a delicious twist awaiting in its dynamic take on tactical combat.

Players command multiple units of up to five warriors across the field of play in real time, shifting to a fully rendered 2D battle when colliding with an enemy unit. Instead of falling back on turn-based combat or Rock/Paper/Scissors class warfare, units act automatically from a simple set of rules defined before skirmishes.

For example, you may assign skills that buff a specified class in your unit, attack a particular enemy type with a focus on lowest defense stats, and then heal your own teammates if their health ever drops below half. It's a fiendishly clever spin on the genre that makes every skirmish feel like a puzzle, and every victory genuinely earned.

The sortie ends when the enemy's base is captured or their ranks are depleted. And, yes, this is incredibly fun (and addicting), but it's in the customization elements that the game truly shines! This combat system encourages vivid experimentation, an attitude that extends across the entirety of Unicorn Overlord.

Outside of battle, this game has a downright impressive amount of activities. As you move through the five continents of the overworld, you'll recruit over 60 different teammates, farm resources to upgrade town hubs, romance your teammates and even cook gorgeously rendered meals, among other tasks.

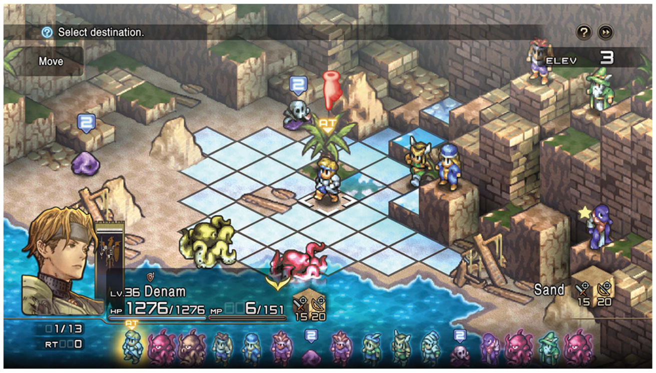
This can seem overwhelming at first, but the game does a phenomenal job of pacing out the introduction of mechanics and teaching each one in a controlled environment before passing on full control. This might seem limiting to players who want to jump right in and get their hands dirty, but there are so many moving parts that even experts in the tactical RPG genre will ultimately appreciate the considerate guidance – especially as more challenging layers are introduced to battles beyond the opening act.

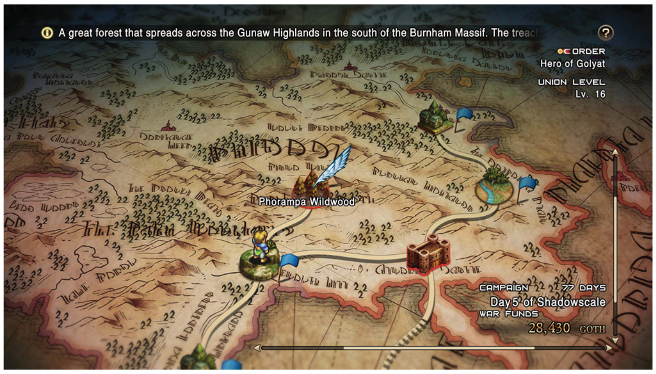
To claim back Price Alain's family birthright to the usurped throne from an evil despot, you'll travel across the land, bolstering your ranks until you, the player, decide you're finally ready to take on the final boss. The main story largely steps back once the game really gets cooking, but this in full service of giving the massive cast of characters each their 15 minutes of narrative fame and takes into account that a more zealous player may already find themselves ready for the title bout by the halfway point.

With so much to do and freely customize over its 30-50 hour campaign, Unicorn Overlord is the sort of game you'll find yourself suddenly awake until 3 a.m. playing. At times, it's frighteningly impossible to put down! Fights are meaty, but always engaging thanks to cleverly satisfying gameplay. (Though you can always fast-forward through combat if you're in a rush.)

After the genre-bending surprise of 13 Sentinels: Aegis Rim (which hit the Switch in 2022), it feels like we're now living through the strongest years of Vanillaware – and Unicorn Overlord is a worthy addition to their already legendary pedigree. Where will this team take us next? **– JOHN-CHARLES**

SWITCH PUBLISHER: SEGA DEVELOPER: VANILLAWARE RATING: T





Let Us Continue to Cling Together

TACTICS OGRE: REBORN

THIS ONE'S BEEN sitting on my shelf for a while now.

It was released back in November 2022, and I was initially excited to play and review it shortly thereafter – but life got in the way. I knew that, as an in-depth tactical RPG with a long, deep story to sit through, playing it would take an investment of many more hours than I had to offer in that season of life, since we had a brand-new baby in the house back then.

One year later, we were hard at work on Issue #69, which we decided would focus on the various different kinds of remakes. I remembered my unplayed copy of Tactics Ogre: Reborn – which is both a remake of 1995's Tactics Ogre: Let Us Cling Together and a remaster/remake of the 2010 PSP version of the same game – and though it'd be a perfect fit. Alas, again, I ran out of time. I begrudgingly bumped it back, resolving to revisit this review later still.

Finally, I found a bit of time to sit down and experience the game. But only a bit – I can't claim to have fully completed this quest, or even to have come anywhere close. Full disclosure! But I have played enough to finally get a firsthand sense of the upgrades that have been introduced to this nearly 30-year-old strategy classic, and I'm fully impressed by Square Enix's efforts in every area.

For starters, the story is immensely more immersive than ever before thanks to the inclusion of full voice acting in all the cutscenes. They really spared no expense here – dozens of different voice actors were called in to give every major and minor character their own unique sound, and that just helps you get into the narrative so much more than spending hours just scrolling through silent text boxes. Truly well done work on the audio.

The visuals of all the many menus and character portraits are polished to perfection as well. Everything looks so clean and has been repositioned and reorganized to making play through battles flow better than in older versions. Give me a good, clean U.I. with easily readable stats in a strategy game and I'm one happy camper!

A little less impressive are the characters and environments, all of which are rendered with sprites that have been spiffed up compared to the SNES or PSP days, but haven't been made quite as amazing as those seen in some of Square Enix's other HD-2D titles. They look good, but one more pass could've been made to make them really shine.

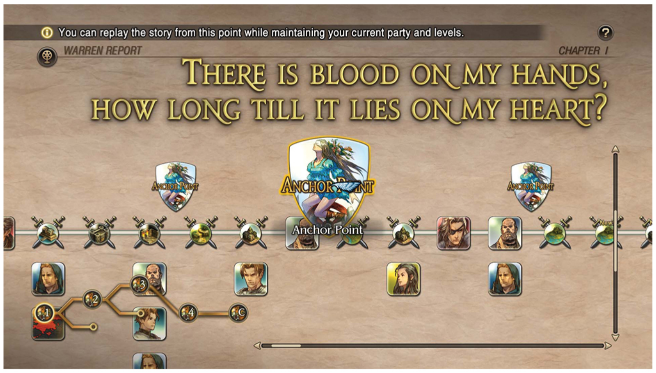
There have been so many tweaks made to the core gameplay that I couldn't possibility list them all here – how leveling up works, how your characters learn and use skills, how class changes take place and more are all different than before. And yet, those kinds of changes aren't really noticeable except for hardcore tactics gamers who would've played the older versions so many years ago. And the SNES version wasn't even really an SNES version – it was only ever sold in Japan, on Super Famicom! So most Americans never played that one.

Myself included. I got into this kind of gaming through the game that came after this one: Final Fantasy Tactics, which did come to the West on the first PlayStation and became my favorite game on that platform. I'd always wanted to go back and play its predecessor . . . but never found the time.

It may be decades before I'll again have huge blocks of free hours that I can dedicate to really diving into all the super-long RPG games I want to. My backlog stack is going to be 20 feet tall in a retirement home some day! But if you find yourself with a bit more free time than me in your current season, consider getting all the way invested into Tactics Ogre. **– LUCAS**

8.5

SWITCH PUBLISHER/DEVELOPER: SQUARE ENIX RATING: T



Let’s Use the Triangle Strategy!

PERSONA 5 TACTICA

PERSONA IS PROLIFIC.

This series just can’t be stopped! Once it was simply a spin-off of the more venerable Shin Megami Tensei franchise, but Persona has grown so far beyond those humble origins that it’s now eclipsed that ancestor series and established its own massive, twisted family tree full of sequels, remakes of those sequels, and several genre-swapping spin-offs of those sequels and their remakes. In recent years “Persona 5” has become its own brand unto itself, spanning six different games, including two versions of the original adventure that first introduced the world to Joker and the rest of the Phantom Thieves, as well as four off-shoots, all of which play totally uniquely. There’s a dungeon crawler. A hack-and-slash Musou. A dancing game! And, finally, the most recent: this turn-based tactics title.

Persona 5 Tactica carries on the P5 sub-series tradition of keeping its storyline separate from its predecessors (and also canon as a new adventure taking place after those prior outings). The wrinkle this time is that the old battle mechanics have been swapped out with a grid-based strategy system. The closest comparison is Ubisoft’s Mario + Rabbids games, which similarly had players taking command of three heroes at a time and directing them through boxy battlefields where taking cover is critical.

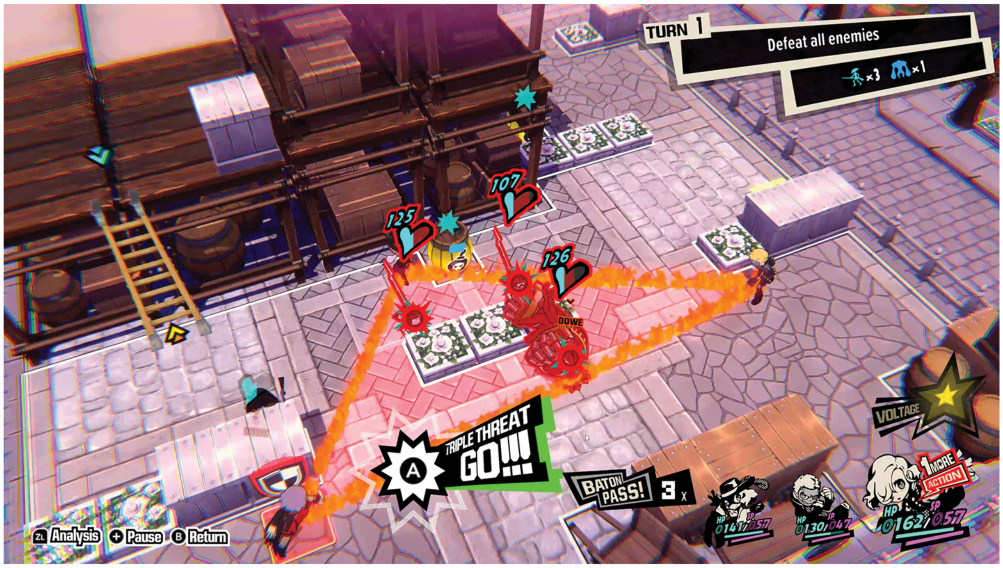
Hiding behind barrels and barriers, the Thieves position themselves to snipe their foes from afar while keeping themselves protected from retaliation. Tactica’s basics include a ranged weapon for each hero to use to deal simple damage, melee strikes that force foes out of their own cover positions and the ability to summon this series’ signature Personas – huge, spectral allies that can unleash larger attacks, burn foes or blow them away (all for an added MP casting cost).

It’s all straightforward strategy fare – but there is a unique mechanic here I have to praise: Triple Threats are special attacks that deal gigantic damage, but they can only be used by first toppling a foe to break their defense, and then surrounding them on all sides with each of your three active fighters. A fiery triangle will be projected onto the grid to represent the area that will be assaulted when you trigger the attack, and all foes caught within its boundaries will be hit – not just the one that got toppled to begin with. So Tactica turns into a genuinely unique challenge of battlefield positioning, as you’re always trying to get your heroes arranged in just the right spots to be able to activate as many Triple Threats as possible.

The combat still keeps itself from getting overcomplicated, and remains compelling throughout the longer-than-expected storyline. A lot of that story length comes from dialogue scenes that begin to wear out their welcome, though. There are tons of fully voiced exchanges between the characters, and the voice acting is great, but when the game hits 20 or 30 minutes before getting you back into active gameplay, I get antsy. The menuing, weapon upgrades, Persona fusions and more all take time too, and I wish all of that had been dialed back a bit more in favor of more frequent fights. Still, I’m walking away from this one impressed – Persona has added yet another fruitful branch to its growing family tree. **– LUCAS**

9.0

SWITCH PUBLISHER: SEGA DEVELOPER: P-STUDIO RATING: T



Snake, Answer Me! Snake? Snaaaake!!

METAL GEAR SOLID: MASTER COLLECTION VOL. 1

THE ORIGINS OF the Metal Gear series are finally available on a modern Nintendo platform! And while this collection is by no means perfect, it's more than serviceable enough to get the job done.

The quality of the games included isn't really in question. They're as solid as Snake himself – but things aren't all sunshine and chaff grenades, because there are a few factors that hold this back from being the collection Metal Gear deserves.

The physical release includes Metal Gear and Snake's Revenge from the NES, Metal Gear and Metal Gear 2 from MSX, Metal Gear Solid from PSX and Metal Gear Solid 2 and 3 from PS2. Of those games, only the NES and MSX titles are actually on the game card. Everything else needs to be downloaded, which is far from optimal. Also, when you put the game card in, your Switch menu will immediately be cluttered with five different icons. It's not that big of a deal, but it is kind of messy.

The games all look and play great, but each one comes with its own set of minor issues. Starting with the NES games, both run 100% authentically, right down to their bad translations. They both have optional save states, which is great, but neither one offers a rewind function, which in these games in particular is a letdown, as they both feature numerous instant-death traps that can be extremely frustrating.

The MSX games fare even worse, as they lack both rewind and save states. Those same instant-kill traps are even more frustrating thanks to the MSX's somewhat clunky controls, and the archaic save system is weirdly nebulous, tied to elevators and certain doors, making completing these classics sometimes feel like a chore.

For better or worse, Metal Gear Solid looks exactly as it did in 1998, in all its blocky glory, but it also suffers from a few voice-acting quirks. During the Codec segments when a character tells Snake which button to press, the text is altered but the voices cut out completely. Everything else is more or less intact, like finding Meryl's Codec frequency on the back of the box, but the iconic Psycho Mantis encounter always plays out the same, no matter how much you like Castlevania. (If you know, you know).

As for the PS2 games, the only issue I ran into was with MGS2's framerate. The original version ran at 60fps, while this one only runs at 30. This is nowhere near as big a deal as it sounds – MGS2 is still a great-looking game – but maintaining that original framerate would've been nice. MGS3's textures could've used a bit more touching up too, but again, it hardly holds it back in any meaningful way.

The bottom line is, with the exception of Snake's Revenge (which is a tedious, unrewarding slog), every single game here is well worth playing. It's hard to look at this collection and not think about how much better it could have been with just a little more effort, but what is here is so darn good it's impossible not to recommend.

The writing can be a little cringey, and a more elegant presentation would have been appreciated, but these games are classics for a reason. If you already have them in other forms, this collection won't bring much new to the table, but if you're new to Metal Gear or haven't played it in a long time, this first volume of the Master Collection is not to be missed.

And if the full collection seems like too much Metal Gear for you to take on all at once? Konami is also selling the Master Collection versions of the three Metal Gear Solid titles as standalone downloads in the Switch eShop. You'd save money to just get the whole set, but if you're only in the mood for one, they're priced individually at $19.99 apiece. **– KRIS**

8.5

SWITCH PUBLISHER/DEVELOPER: KONAMI RATING: M

The Wanderer vs. The Water

SHIREN THE WANDERER: THE MYSTERY DUNGEON OF SERPENTCOIL ISLAND

ONE. MORE. RUN.

That's what roguelike developers are really hoping their players will say. After they fail, and fall, and fall short again. After they lose and get flung all the way back to the beginning of the game, *again*, and see their inventory emptied, their equipment discarded and their experience points reset to a great big goose egg. They hope they'll still want to try again, one more time.

And I do. Every time!

Shiren the Wander: The Mystery Dungeon of Serpentcoil Island is just as harsh as its decades' worth of predecessors have been when it comes to its penalties for failure – but the magic in the midst of this series' famous brutality is that I genuinely do always want to give the dungeon just one more shot after every Game Over. It's a difficult game, but difficult in an encouraging, dust-yourself-off kind of way, not in a throw-your-controller-across-the-room-and-scream kind of way. (I haven't had to replace any Joy-Cons after playing this, which is nice.)

If you're new to the Shiren series, let me encourage you to go back two issues and first read my review of Shiren 5 in NF #69. I played that game in order to prepare myself for this one, which is also known as Shiren 6.

That's the same path I'd suggest all newcomers take, too, because the previous game was more beginner-friendly – it was packed with in-depth tutorials, it set players up with a fair amount of items before kicking them into the main thrust of the game and it introduced ally characters earlier on. (They can bear some of the baddies' brunt in battle.) Serpentcoil Island, on the other hand, is not quite so kind.

This game really just drops Shiren straight into its dungeon with nothing but the shirt on his back. You have to simply punch enemies until you find some kind of weapon – and often, you don't! In one of my most successful early runs, I was flinging fists all the way until the eighth floor, because there simply were no swords or axes or *anything* to be found before then.

That's the randomization at work! The Mystery Dungeon is ever-changing and unforgiving. You'll have runs in which you blessedly find a magical blade and a glowing shield and whole treasure trove of spellcastings scrolls within your first few minutes! And then, in your next run, you'll die to the very first enemy you encounter because you'll unluckily whiff your first few punches. You can just never know what fate will have in store for you each time you start.

. . . Well, I mean, you can eventually have *some* influence on your future success. Play long enough and you'll be able to store some of the items you collect in a warehouse. There, they're safe from the penalty of deletion that normally follows your moment of failure, and they'll be waiting for you to pick up and use to start a subsequent attempt.

I had one run that was looking great . . . until I got one-shotted by a tiny little Cave Mamel. Luckily, I had sent a great sword to the warehouse just before I fell. That was comforting!

You also aren't entirely alone in your endeavors here. When you die (again, that's when, not if), you'll have the option to request a rescue from an online player. Somewhere else, out in the real world, another Shiren 6 fan may see your request and choose to save your skin! That involves playing through the same permutations of the dungeon floors that you just endured, all the way up until the moment you fell. (But hopefully doing a little bit better than you did.) If they succeed, then your single-player adventure will be revived and you can continue on, avoiding a Game Over. It's a great feature, and I applaud its inclusion.

It takes patience, though. Lots of Shiren players are active and sending out requests, so yours might not be seen and completed quickly. While you wait, I suggest paying it forward! You can pick up rescue requests posted by others and try to be the one who comes to *their* rescue! When I successfully completed my first rescue, I felt so satisfied. I really helped somebody out!

That same kind of anonymous online altruism was recently a part of Super Mario Bros. Wonder too, and I loved it there as well. It just feels nice to be nice to others. We're all in this together!

Presentation-wise I think Shiren 6 looks fine. I personally prefer the old sprite art style, but it's 2024 now and it's perfectly fine for this series to finally move into 3D. The main visual of the looming, sinister central mountain is especially striking.

The story is also motivating, as you do get more and more revealed as you make more attempts at the dungeon – so there's a sense of progression in that, even if your XP keeps getting knocked back to Level 1. And it will. And hopefully, when it does, you'll feel motivated to keep going. To risk defeat one more time. To give the Mystery Dungeon one more run!

– LUCAS

8.5

SWITCH PUBLISHER/DEVELOPER: SPIKE CHUNSOFT RATING: E10+

Will You Decide to Trust the Fungus?

SUPER MARIO BROS.: THE MOVIE: 30TH ANNIVERSARY 4K ULTRA HD VERSION

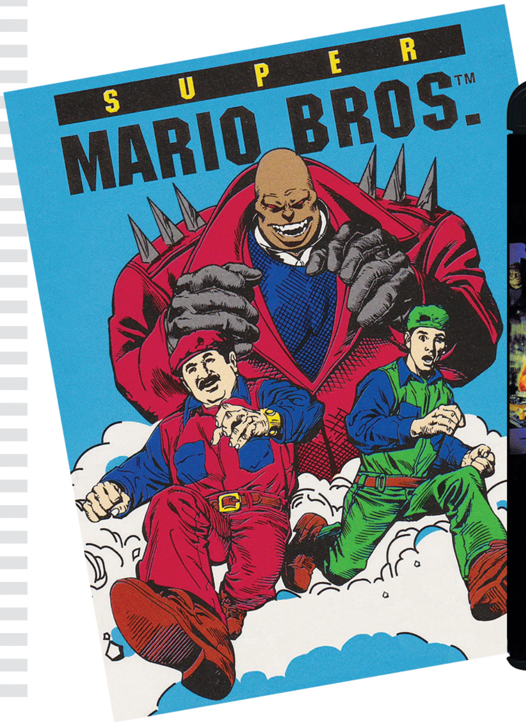
FIRST THINGS FIRST, I just want to disabuse you of any notion that this review of the new Super Mario Bros.: The Movie 4K Ultra HD re-release is in any way a review of the content of the movie itself. Rest assured, it is not. After more than three decades, if you've even heard of it at all, then you no doubt know it's one of the most maligned, critically-panned video game movies of all time – but also one that has nevertheless amassed a cult following of fans, of which I proudly stand as one. Put simply, it's not widely regarded as a good movie, but many do still consider it an enjoyable one.

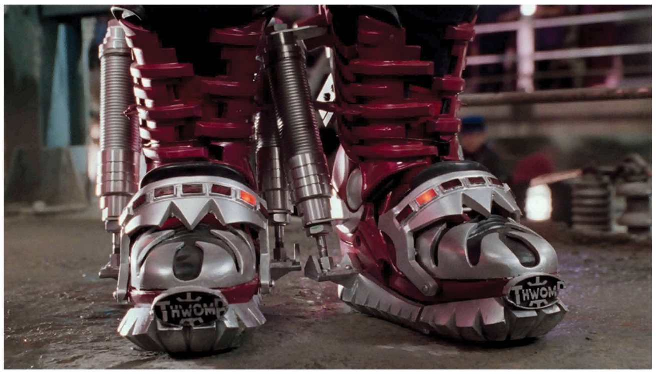
That said, this review and its score are designed to focus first and foremost on the treatment of the movie as it's been given a 4K UHD makeover, as well as the content and quality of the extras and the bonus features found on the disc. Umbrella Entertainment was kind enough to provide us with a review copy of the core version (with slipcase), which is what is included in all versions of the movie found on their website. (Though it seems they've run out of slipcase versions of the core release?) If you want a review of all of the other bonus swag included in the higher-end editions, you'll have to look elsewhere!

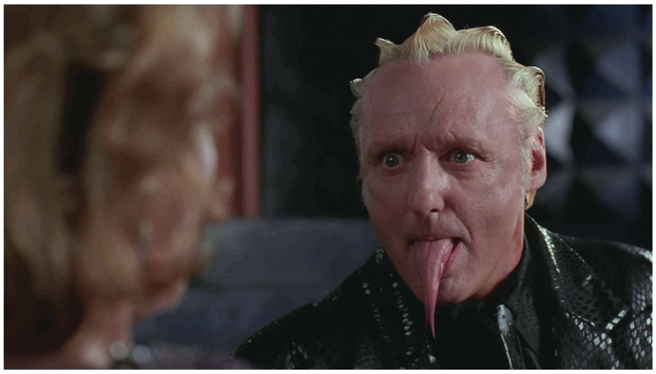
Ever since 1994's live-action Street Fighter movie starring Raul Julia and Jean-Claude Van Damme was re-released with a newly enhanced high-definition format in 2021, fans of Super Mario Bros. have been asking, "Where's *our* HD upgrade?"

Well, I assume they have been. *I* have been, and I can't be alone, right?

Right! As proof, the fine folks and friends to Nintendo Force over at the Super Mario Bros. The Movie Archive have joined forces with Umbrella Entertainment to bring us what may very well stand as the definitive release of this truly infamous film.







First of all, the 4K treatment makes the movie look *spectacular*. All sorts of details really pop, and it just blows the old DVD release completely out of the water! It feels like a night-and-day difference if you go back and forth between the two. I'm truly impressed.

There's 5.1 surround sound, too, if you have the speaker setup to support it – *unfortunately*, I do not. Word is that the improvement to the sound is even more stunning than the visual upgrade, but I just don't have a home theater that's robust enough to put that to the test. Even so, the sound seemed to be top-notch to the degree that I could tell with my limited equipment – even on some of the other features, which I'll get to momentarily.

The aforementioned DVD release was pretty bare-bones. It had chapter selection. Subtitles. The movie itself. And that was pretty much it. But here, there are *gobs* of features, even in the basic edition. I can't go into to detail about every single one here, but rest assured, if you love this movie and want more, more is what you will get here. *Much* more, all wrapped in some stellar menus that play "Walk the Dinosaur" to get you in the mood.

Included are the theatrical trailers – even the Japanese ones. I was worried at first, as I thought for a moment that maybe some had been left out – specifically, the television commercials (including my favorite, the "Jump!" commercial) – but nope! Those are all here, even including a pair for the tie-in toy line from Ertl! These use the original footage, which isn't up to the same quality as the movie itself, but it's nevertheless great to see them included.

There are also some music videos (featuring songs that were either cut or not fully featured in the film), deleted scenes, and storyboard versions of scenes that were either heavily changed or cut entirely. The big one for me is the "Brooklyn Bridge Climax," which looks like it was planned out when they still had hopes of casting Arnold Schwarzenegger as Koopa. The Photo Gallery shows off more storyboards, production art and behind-the-scenes photos.

There are some great commentaries here too: four in all. One is by screenwriter Parker Bennett, who makes some humorous observations about how some things didn't quite work out as planned, as well as pointing out some logical inconsistencies. Another one features Steven Applebaum and Ryan Hoss, who really get into the nerdy stuff (and I mean that in the best way). Along with the crisper visuals, they had me rewinding frequently to check out details I hadn't noticed, even all these years later.

Then there's also the Lasagna Workprint, which gives a good look at the shape the movie was in before the editing phase. It contains cut footage, alternate versions of scenes and dialogue, and footage of scenes before special effects were added in post. (The Bigger Pictures Film Restoration channel on YouTube has a video that goes into more extensive detail about how the Lasagna Workprint came to be. It's impressive stuff.)

Also, the reason it's called "The Lasagna Workprint"? It's not because of the Mario brothers' Italian heritage – or at least, not *just* because of that – but rather due to the technique of compiling five different "layers" or transfers of material sourced from a VHS tape to produce what we see in this set.

I'm giving this release a 9.5, as I think it's probably as good as you can get, and certainly the best treatment the movie has seen since its release 30+ years ago – and may be as close to definitive as we can get. However, knowing the guys at the Super Mario Bros. The Movie Archive, they've been finding new stuff for years, and there may yet be some other stuff that they could wind up unearthing, to be added to some future edition. So there's wiggle room for things to perhaps get even better.

Even so, if you're a fan of this film, then this package is a must-own.

If this review has motivated you to consider a purchase, though, one last reminder: You need to go to Umbrella Entertainment's online storefront at **shop.umbrellaent.com.au** to order from them directly. It's not for sale anywhere else! **– DAVID**

9.5

4K UHD PUBLISHER/DEVELOPER: UMBRELLA ENTERTAINMENT
RATING: PG

IMPORT REVIEW

Trial of the Taiko Tanuki

OTOGI KATSUGEKI MAMEDA NO BAKERU: ORACLE SAITAROU NO SAINAN!!

I'M DONE WITH feeling intimidated. Importing has never been easier! Whenever an interesting new title pops up in Japan, gamers in the West can simply surf to such online shops as Play-Asia to place an order. The delivery times are a little longer than buying a product that's already in the same country you are, but the convenience is nearly on par with Amazon.

And the Switch is region-free! In past Nintendo generations, playing games from other parts of the world involved complicated extra steps or special, additional software. Not any more — now, any cartridge you insert into your system will just work, as-is.

Even with that ease of ordering and the lack of any extra hardware hoops to jump through to get the games to run, though, I've still allowed myself to be pushed away from importing tons of titles over the years because of the last, and most obvious obstacle: the language barrier. I'm not fluent in Japanese! Few people living in the States are, and that leaves most of the rest of us sitting on our hands and grumbling for localization announcements that, too often, never come.

Well, I'm done waiting and I'm done letting the language intimidate me. I'm going to play the games I want to play, in the original Japanese!

Ushering myself into this defiant new chapter of my gaming career, I recently imported a spectacular game that you might've caught a glimpse of online since its reveal in Japan's version of last June's Nintendo Direct. It's called Otogi Katsugeki Mameda no Bakeru: Oracle Saitorou no Sainan!!, and it was crafted by the talented developers at Good-Feel — the same fine folks who previously brought us such hits as Yoshi's Woolly World, Kirby's Epic Yarn and even Princess Peach: Showtime!, reviewed just a few pages ago. I feel like this one rivals all their best work from the past, though, and is a new stand-out for the studio.

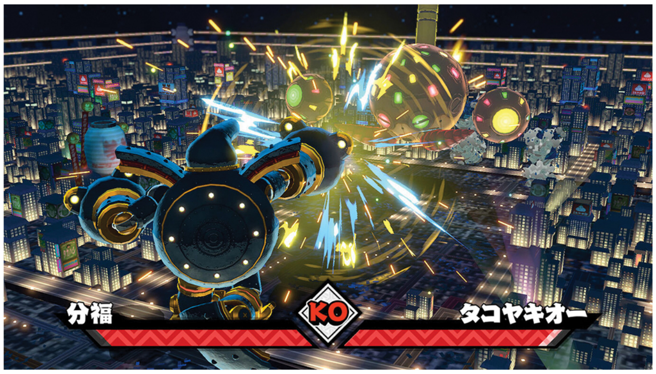
SWITCH PUBLISHER: NINTENDO
DEVELOPER: GOOD-FEEL
RATING: E

Mameda no Bakeru (to shorten the name a bit) is a 3D action/platforming romp. You take command of a shape-shifiting tanuki boy named Bakeru and set out on a quest to save all of Japan. The country has been overrun by the minions of Oracle Saitarou, a villain who's so self-absorbed that he's celebrating himself all over the nation with festivals declaring his greatness. A bunch of festivals might not seem like the worst thing . . . except the evil Oracle is also using them to broadcast mind control over Japan's population!

Bakeru dashes through stages all based on real locations in Japan, bopping his way through huge numbers of foes to find and shatter three magic lanterns. Doing that breaks the barrier on Saitarou's big broadcasting tower at the end of the stage, so Bakeru can bash that too and dispel all its evil magic.

Our hero's weapon of choice makes for a unique combat system: Bakeru fights with a drum set! He holds one drumstick in each hand, and you can attack with either one independently by pressing L or R. The drum itself is mainly defensive: When projectiles are heading your way, you can counter and reflect them back with precise timing of holding up the drum. Some different movement options and attack combos round out Bakeru's main moves, and he's a fun hero to inhabit!

. . . But he has more than one hero hiding inside him. Since he's a shape-shifter, Bakeru can also transform into different forms that alter his abilities! He's got a "small" form that lets him fit into tight spaces and jump longer distances. A "power" form that bulks up his body. A form that dual-wields a pair of fishing poles so he can attack foes at a distance, and more! He's always changing things up.



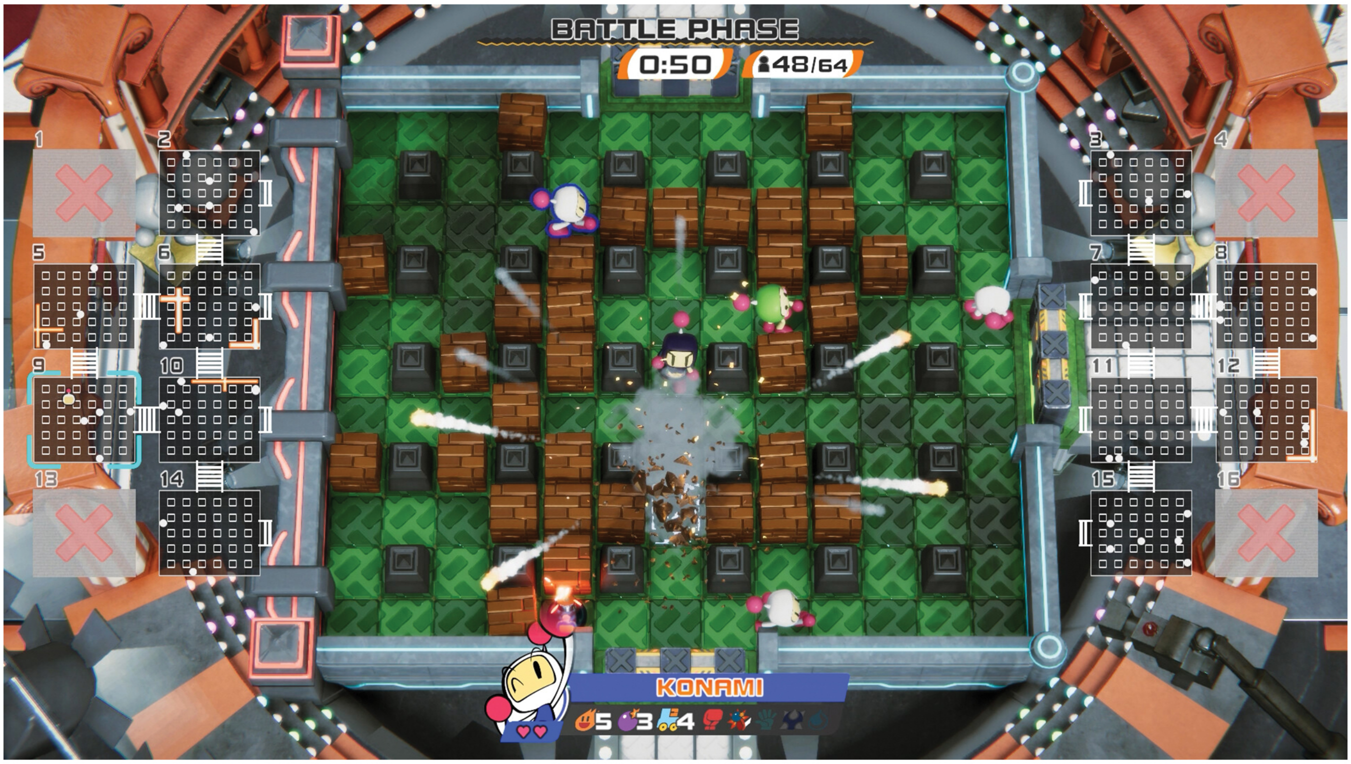
There's a special energy meter that drains away when you're using one of the transformations, which would seem to limit their usage. But not in practice: The game is so generous with item drops that you can use any of Bakeru's special forms as much as you want, pretty much, since you can be assured that you'll get plenty of energy refills before you ever run out. Health refills and money are also doled out frivolously, and there are lots of item shops selling even more boosts to your abilities if you need even more of an edge. Mameda no Bakeru isn't too tough of a game.

The only thing that's tricky to deal with is the language. This isn't a super text-heavy game — once you get the hang of the controls, you can easily enjoy 90% of the experience with no need to really read anything. But for instruction screens and cutscenes when I wanted to absorb more of the story, I simply used my smartphone and the Google Translate app. It has a camera function wherein you can just point your phone toward the screen while you play; it'll detect Japanese words and instantly translate them into English through an augmented reality kind of view. It's a literal game-changer! It's been so nice to play this game this way — popping open the app when I need it, then setting it aside and just enjoying being Bakeru the rest of the time.

This honestly is such a pleasant adventure, and one Good-Feel so clearly poured so much feeling into. It's got so much heart! It looks great, it sounds great and it's long. Super long — you definitely get more than your money's worth, and especially so since the current import price is just about $36 as of this writing.

It might be nice to see this game get a localized release, but I don't know . . . I kind of think the original Japanese experience is the way to go with this game, since it does so much to celebrate Japan itself. If you've ever liked any of Good-Feel's games, you're willing to broaden your horizons and, like me, you now refuse to be intimidated by the language barrier, buy a copy of Mameda no Bakeru! — **LUCAS**

9.0



Battle of the Bomber Brothers!

SUPER BOMBERMAN R 2

WITH A WHOLE lot of sons living in this home with me, one way I've been able to judge a video game's quality is hearing whether or not it gets played when I'm not around.

I introduce the boys to tons of new games – frequently running through single-player content with them there watching me, or else inviting them to pick up controllers too to help me play multiplayer modes. But when my time is done and I'm off to make magazine pages or mow the lawn or something, what games do they choose to play on their own? Mary and I give them only limited game time each week, so every minute is precious to them; they'd never waste any of their time on a game they don't think is a winner.

Lately, they've been playing a lot of Super Bomberman R 2.

I was excited to introduce them to this franchise, and this was really my first opportunity to do so – they were either too young or not even born yet the last time a new Bomberman title hit the Switch over seven years ago. Having experienced the legendary 16-bit Bomberman era in my younger years (using good old SNES Multitaps), I knew they'd love the frantic, explosive bomb battles of this series.

Sure enough, they've been a real winner here. I'll be upstairs washing dishes and I'll hear uproarious laughter coming from the basement, where each of the Thomas brothers have embodied a Bomberman brother and have proceeded to blow each other to kingdom come.

So basic local multiplayer matches remain the heart and soul of this series – which is nothing surprising. But what about the new content? How does that fare here? Well, I've got good news and bad. Let's have the good first.

Super Bomberman R 2's crown jewel is a great new online multiplayer mode called Battle 64. Taking a page out of the same playbook that made games like Tetris 99, Pac-Man 99 and Super Mario Bros. 35 so great, it pits a total of 64 players against each other simultaneously in a massive battle, and whittles the competitors away one at a time until there's only one left standing.

It's not just a huge free-for-all in a single arena, though. Smartly, it splits the competition up into 16 rooms of four players apiece to begin with, and then slowly shoves the survivors of each of those smaller battles together into fewer and fewer rooms over time. You've got a few seconds between rounds in which to safely move to a new position before a fresh set of blocks drops from the sky and the bombs start flying again. And there's room for strategy – you can try to play cautiously, avoiding fights to give yourself a higher likelihood of making it into the final rounds. Or you can go for broke, trying to blast everything and everyone in sight and earning lots of power-ups so you're better positioned to claim the final victory.

Battle 64 is brilliant, and even better, it uses cross-play – so you'll get matched with players on PC, Xbox and PlayStation platforms, ensuring shorter wait times to start each battle.

Now, the bad news: The single-player content here stinks. It's beyond bland. Super basic, boring stuff, with Bomberman slowly trudging around lifeless worlds, blowing up bricks and gathering cute little alien creatures together. There are dirt-simple puzzle challenges. Boss battles that and frighteningly uncompelling. And the developers tried to shoehorn in a lot of tower defense stuff and a level editor for building up your "castle" and none of it jives with Bomberman's real vibe at all. All of Story mode feels like a major miss to me.

So, if you're going to play this latest Bomberman, ignore the solo parts and stick with what's always worked: great multiplayer bomb battles. They're Thomas brother approved! **– LUCAS**

8.0

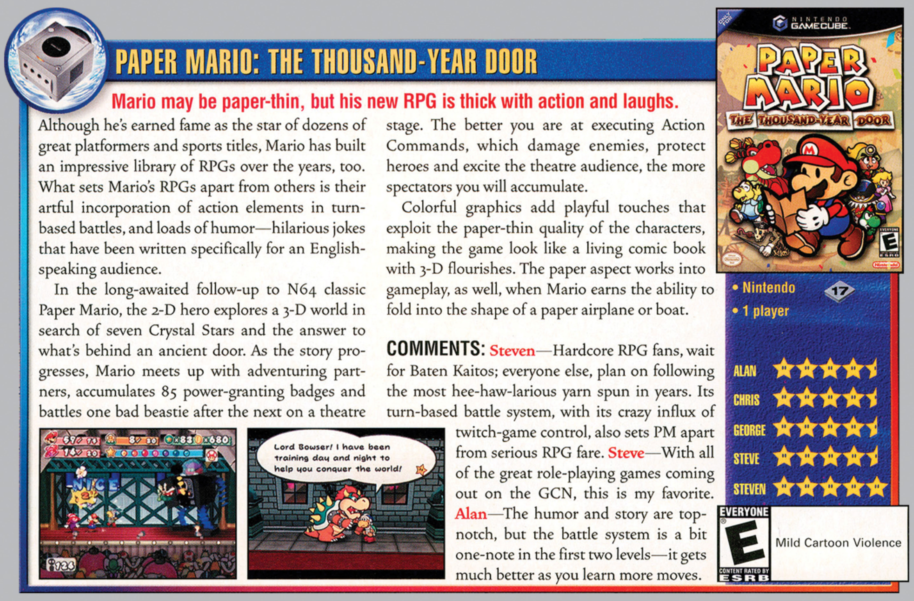
SWITCH PUBLISHER/DEVELOPER: KONAMI RATING: E10+

ARCHIVE

The complete list of Nintendo Force retail reviews from the last two years. Scores reflect individual reviewers' opinions.

SWITCH

TITLE	SCORE	REVIEWER	ISSUE
Ace Angler: Fishing Spirits	6.5	Rebecca	#63
Advance Wars 1+2: Re-Boot Camp	9.5	Lucas	#65
AEW: Fight Forever	7.0	David	#67
AI: The Somnium Files – nirvanA Initiative	8.0	Tony	#62
Another Code: Recollection	8.0	J.-Charles	#70
Apollo Justice: Ace Attorney Trilogy	8.5	Rebecca	#70
Atari 50: The Anniversary Celebration	9.5	Kris	#64
Atelier Ryza 3: Alchemist of the End & The Secret Key	9.0	Thor	#67
Atelier Sophie 2: The Alchemist of the Mysterious Dream	8.0	Maggie	#59
Baten Kaitos I & II HD Remaster	8.0	Lucas	#68
Bayonetta 3	9.0	Jonathan	#63
Bayonetta Origins: Cereza and the Lost Demon	8.0	Jonathan	#65
Bluey: The Videogame	7.0	Lucas	#70
Bugsnax	8.5	Lucas	#61
Capcom Fighting Collection	9.0	Jonathan	#61
ConnecTank	7.5	Lucas	#67
Detective Pikachu Returns	6.0	Lucas	#68
Digimon Survive	8.0	Maggie	#63
Disney Illusion Island	6.5	J.-Charles	#68
DNF Duel	8.0	Sean	#66
Double Dragon Gaiden: Rise of the Dragons	8.0	Kris	#67
Dragon Quest Treasures	8.0	Matthew T.	#64
Everybody 1-2-Switch!	7.5	Kris	#67
Fashion Dreamer	7.0	Rebecca	#69
Fire Emblem Engage	8.5	Rebecca	#64
Fire Emblem Warriors: Three Hopes	8.0	Rebecca	#61
Harvestella	8.0	Nadia	#63
Infinity Strash: Dragon Quest – The Adventure of Dai	5.0	Lucas	#68
JoJo's Bizarre Adventure: All-Star Battle R	6.5	Tony	#62
Kirby and the Forgotten Land	10	Lucas	#59
Kirby's Return to Dream Land Deluxe	9.0	Lucas	#65
LEGO Star Wars: The Skywalker Saga	9.0	Thor	#59
LIVE A LIVE	8.5	Rebecca	#61
Loop8: Summer of Gods	6.0	Maggie	#66
Mario + Rabbids Sparks of Hope	9.0	Lucas	#63
Mario Strikers: Battle League	7.5	Lucas	#60
Mario vs. Donkey Kong	7.5	Lucas	#70
Master Detective Archives: Rain Code	7.0	Matthew T.	#67
Mega Man Battle Network Legacy Collection	8.0	David	#65
Metroid Prime Remastered	10	Lucas	#64
MLB The Show 22	8.5	Dan	#59
Nickelodeon All-Star Brawl 2	5.5	David	#69
Nickelodeon Kart Racers 3: Slime Speedway	8.0	David	#63
Nintendo Switch Sports	7.5	Lucas	#59
Octopath Traveler II	8.5	Rebecca	#65
Pac-Man Museum+	8.5	Kris	#60
Pac-Man World Re-Pac	7.5	Lucas	#62
Persona 3 Portable	9.0	Maggie	#70
Pikmin 4	10	Lucas	#67
Pocky & Rocky Reshrined	8.5	Lucas	#69
Pokémon Scarlet	8.5	Lucas	#63
Pokémon Violet	8.5	Lucas	#63
Prince of Persia: The Lost Crown	9.0	Derrick	#70
Puzzle Bobble Everybubble!	8.0	Jonathan	#67
Rain on Your Parade	8.0	Lucas	#65
Record of Lodoss War: Deedlit in Wonder Labyrinth	8.0	Jonathan	#60
Rune Factory 3 Special	7.5	Rebecca	#68
Rune Factory 5	7.5	Maggie	#59
Samba de Amigo: Party Central	7.0	J.-Charles	#69
Sea of Stars	9.5	Kris	#68
Shiren the Wanderer: The Tower of Fortune and the Dice of Fate	8.5	Lucas	#69
Silent Hope	8.0	Brett	#69
Sonic Frontiers	7.0	Tony	#64
Sonic Origins Plus	8.0	Tony	#67
Sonic Superstars	8.5	Lucas	#69
Splatoon 3	9.0	Lucas	#62
Star Ocean: The Second Story R	7.0	Maggie	#69
Story of Seasons: A Wonderful Life	7.0	Rebecca	#67
Super Mario Bros. Wonder	9.0	Lucas	#69
Super Mario RPG	9.5	Lucas	#69
Taiko no Tatsujin: Rhythm Festival	8.0	J.-Charles	#63
Teenage Mutant Ninja Turtles: Shredder's Revenge	10	Lucas	#60
Teenage Mutant Ninja Turtles: The Cowabunga Collection	9.0	David	#62
The Legend of Heroes: Trails from Zero	9.0	Maggie	#62
The Legend of Heroes: Trails into Reverie	10	Maggie	#67
The Legend of Heroes: Trails to Azure	10	Maggie	#65
The Legend of Nayuta: Boundless Trails	8.0	Maggie	#68
The Legend of Zelda: Tears of the Kingdom	10	Lucas	#66
Theatrhythm Final Bar Line	9.0	J.-Charles	#65
Triangle Strategy	9.0	Nadia	#59
WarioWare: Move It!	8.0	Rebecca	#69
We Love Katamari REROLL + Royal Reverie	9.5	Jonathan	#66
Wunderling DX	8.0	Lucas	#64
Xenoblade Chronicles 3	10	Maggie	#62


PAPER MARIO: THE THOUSAND-YEAR DOOR

Mario may be paper-thin, but his new RPG is thick with action and laughs.

Although he's earned fame as the star of dozens of great platformers and sports titles, Mario has built an impressive library of RPGs over the years, too. What sets Mario's RPGs apart from others is their artful incorporation of action elements in turn-based battles, and loads of humor—hilarious jokes that have been written specifically for an English-speaking audience.

In the long-awaited follow-up to N64 classic Paper Mario, the 2-D hero explores a 3-D world in search of seven Crystal Stars and the answer to what's behind an ancient door. As the story progresses, Mario meets up with adventuring partners, accumulates 85 power-granting badges and battles one bad beastie after the next on a theatre stage. The better you are at executing Action Commands, which damage enemies, protect heroes and excite the theatre audience, the more spectators you will accumulate.

Colorful graphics add playful touches that exploit the paper-thin quality of the characters, making the game look like a living comic book with 3-D flourishes. The paper aspect works into gameplay, as well, when Mario earns the ability to fold into the shape of a paper airplane or boat.

COMMENTS: Steven—Hardcore RPG fans, wait for Baten Kaitos; everyone else, plan on following the most hee-haw-larious yarn spun in years. Its turn-based battle system, with its crazy influx of twitch-game control, also sets PM apart from serious RPG fare. Steve—With all of the great role-playing games coming out on the GCN, this is my favorite. Alan—The humor and story are top-notch, but the battle system is a bit one-note in the first two levels—it gets much better as you learn more moves.

THE NP OPINION
PAPER MARIO: THE THOUSAND-YEAR DOOR

THIS GAMECUBE CLASSIC is just about to get an upgraded encore appearance on the Switch, so let's take a look back at what Nintendo Power's writers thought about the original!

With four out of five evaluators awarding it the equivalent of a 9 out of 10 (and the last one giving it a perfect score!), it's clear that this masterpiece was recognized as such right from the start. It's funny that Steven (who gave the perfect score) advised hardcore fans to wait for Baten Kaitos. I don't disagree that it's an excellent RPG from that era too, but I wouldn't have ever discouraged anyone from playing Thousand-Year Door, no matter their level of role-playing expertise! Like Super Mario RPG, this adventure is suited for all skill evels, from newcomers to seasoned vets. And if you are hardcore? Baten Kaitos is on the Switch already, so no need to wait for it again!

HANDS-ON IMPRESSIONS WITH THE PLAYDATE

One Cranky Game Boy

Mad scientists have fused Nintendo's classic handheld with . . . a fishing rod?

MEET THE PLAYDATE!

Granted, you might have already met the Playdate. It's not a brand-new product any more – it was first revealed to the world in late 2019, then first went on sale two years ago in April 2022. But this little handheld proved to be so popular throughout its preorder period that its publisher, Panic, has only just recently finished fulfilling all those initial orders! So it's experiencing a bit of a second launch now, through the fact that it's finally available to order again.

And I finally got my hands on one! This plucky portable caught my eye years ago, but I only just got my own a few weeks ago, so I'm playing a bit of catch-up. My early thought? It's worthy catching up with!

Playdate comes to us from the same studio who published such indie hits as Firewatch and Untitled Goose Game – but it isn't too often that an indie studio branches out beyond software and actually makes their own game console! It's so wild that this thing even exists. And even more so when you consider how unorthodox its design is!

At a glance, it looks most similar to Nintendo's original Game Boy, with its simple D-Pad and B and A Buttons on its front face. But it's much smaller, measuring only three inches in both width and height – and only half an inch thick! This is a tiny piece of tech to be sure.

Its screen is even more limited than the earliest Game Boy too. That trailblazing Nintendo portable could display four colors at a time. Here, you get only two! It's a 1-bit screen, meaning graphics are built entirely out of black pixels either being on or off. Black or white – that's it.

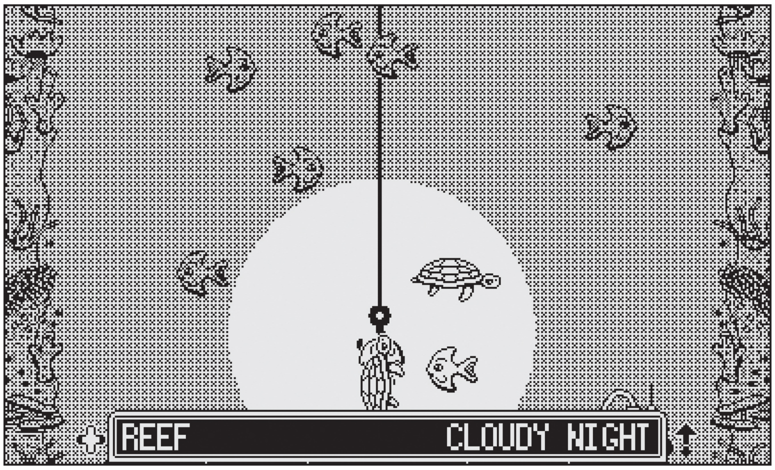
(Artists working on the system do employ dithering techniques to make lots of shades of grey, though.)

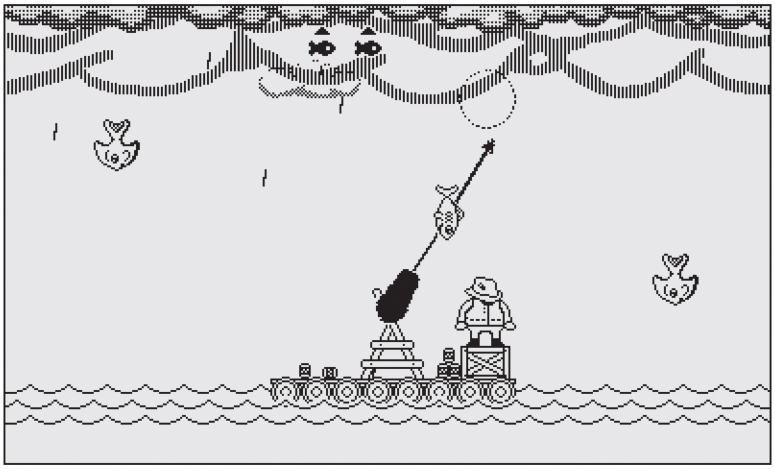
Finally, the biggest standout of the system: the crank! Just like lots of Nintendo systems have had one weird, funky gimmick, the Playdate includes an extra method of input the likes of which gamers have only ever seen pop up before on novelty controllers made to support fishing games. It's a brilliant extra touch of whimsy that ensures everybody who sees the Playdate will do a double take, and also want to give it a spin – quite literally!

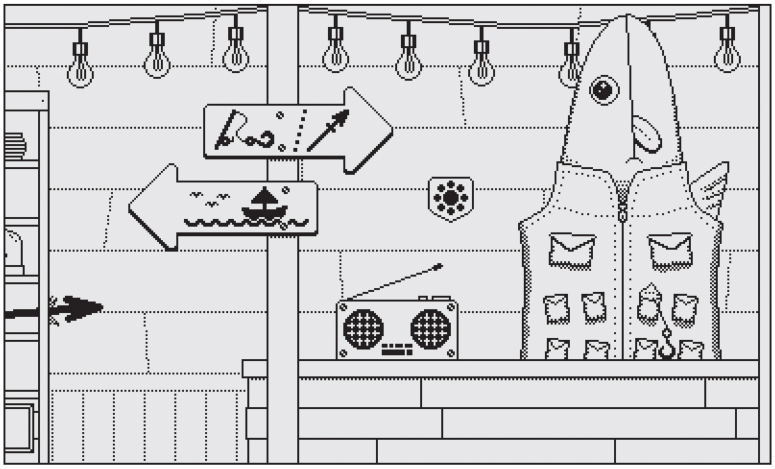
And you know what? It works! The crank is a creative control method, and allows for precise input in lots of interesting ways. You get a whole "season" of 24 games for free when you buy the Playdate, and the very first one on the list is a surfing game called Whitewater Wipeout. It's the perfect showcase for the crank, as you spin it to guide the nose of your surfboard and glide up and down waves, leap into the air to do tricks and then come back down again. It isn't *immediately* intuitive, but just a bit of practice is all it takes to help your brain make sense of it.

More traditional games play primarily with the normal buttons, but that's the big draw here: There's a huge variety of experiences to play. Some are pretty standard! Others are crazy, crank-only quests. A whole community of game creators has embraced the Playdate and several hundred games are now available for it – the tools to make your own are available to anyone, too. (The system itself may be a commercial product, but the whole society that's sprung up to support it makes Community the right magazine section to talk about it!) **– LUCAS**

play.date







play.date/games/reel-istic-fishing

PLAYDATE GAME REVIEW

Reel-istic Fishing

Become a legendary Fish Hunter!

I HAVEN'T PUT in enough time with the Playdate yet to pass judgment on the system itself or assign it a review score for its overall value . . . but, I did want to take the opportunity afforded by its unique fishing reel-esque crank controller and put a real fishing game on the system through its paces for a full review, before we wrap up this ocean-inspired issue. As luck would have it, the 2023 Playdate Game of the Year just so happened to be one!

Reel-istic Fishing is the creation of ToadleyUnderControl, a young game developer who has 134 followers on Twitter and 11 total YouTube subscribers. And yet even a creator who has seemingly made no mark in the industry by traditional marketing metrics can be the one who makes a masterpiece on the Playdate!

In the game, you play as a legendary Fish Hunter who's grown tired of his old fishing holes and wants to challenge himself in all-new waters. He sets sail for the dangerous "Reel-istic Sea" and plans to be the first to catch every species that swims beneath its surface. For fame and fortune!

Gameplay plays out across two phases. First, you plunge your line deep down into the depths, then try to hook as many fish as you can while it's on its way back to your boat. You can speed up or slow down how fast the fish are reeled in by turning the crank, as expected, but you can also just use the D-Pad to keep things simpler if you like. I chose to do that most of the time.

The crank is more of a critical component in the second phase of play: harpooning your catch! Merely dragging fish up out of the ocean on the hook is not enough – because when they break the surface, they all get flung way up into the sky! All of the fish you hooked then start raining back down toward you, and you've got to snipe them out of the air with precisely placed harpoon shots. The crank directs your aim with a great degree of accuracy, and it's a lot of fun to dial in the perfect angle for a shot and then let the spear fly.

Catching lots of fish earns you lots of cash, and cash will buy you upgrades for all of your equipment at the local shop. (Run by a friendly fish-pretending-to-be-a-man named Bubbles.) It's a satisfying gameplay loop, as you unlock more areas and can fish deeper down into the depths to haul up rarer and scarier creatures from the ocean floor.

I can easily understand why the Playdate community has been so taken with this title, as it's a perfect showcase for the system. (You even turn the crank to row the boat from place to place!) If you decide to plunk down $200 for the hardware, make sure you invest an extra $8 for this game. **– LUCAS**

9.5

BOOK REVIEW

MECHNER'S MEMORIES

"Replay" illustrates the story of pioneering game developer Jordan Mechner.

THE RECENTLY RELEASED "Making of Karateka" showed us how Jordan Mechner made his first game, and how his father was instrumental in its creation. Now, thanks to this new autobiography, we've been given a chance to get to know even more about Jordan, his Dad and his extended family.

Like the seminal comics classic Maus, this graphic novel takes a wide-angle view of the life of a modern man of Eastern European Jewish descent as he tries to make sense of generational trauma caused by the Nazi regime. On one page, adult Jordan plays on the beaches of France with his son; on the next, we flash back to decades earlier as his father watched in horror while bombers rained terror down on a nearly identical shoreline. Jordan, an influential game developer, displays his idyllic life in sharp contrast to the harrowing depiction of his father's, who grew up as a child of war. It's both poignant and heartbreaking.

Each era covered in the comic is depicted with a different color, so despite the many time jumps, it's easy enough to keep up with all the whens and wheres. The characters are depicted in a simple but charming style, living in environments rendered in much greater detail, whisking your eyes and mind away to locations all across the world.

Seeing exactly how the events from the past tie to the present isn't always as clear. Some connections are overt, like the white mouse that pops up in both the Prince of Persia games and in the life of Mechner's real-life relatives. In fact, all of the many throughlines that follow Mechner's career, from the original Prince of Persia in the 1980s to the ill-fated "Princess of Persia" project 40 years later, are easy to spot. But for the most part, Mechner takes a more passive, airy approach to imparting meaning, letting his readers interpret things as they see fit.

Much like one of his games, Mechner's Replay is a challenging work that defies expectations.

– JONATHAN

9.5

JordanMechner.com

BY MATTHEW TARANTO

NEXT ISSUE

We poured so many water-themed games into this issue, but there were still more that could've made the cut! We'll catch some of the overflow next time with previews of new titles like **SteamWorld Heist II**, and we'll also have our reviews of **Endless Ocean: Luminous** and **Another Crab's Treasure.**

For our NF #72 theme, though, we're planning to do a tribute to the late, great Akira Toriyama. The legendary manga artist was best known in life as the creator of the globally popular **Dragon Ball** franchise, but he had great contributions to the world of video games far beyond the titles that directly adapt the adventures of Goku. We'll shine the spotlight on them all, soon! (Feel free to take a long nap in a forest full of monsters while you wait.)

IN THE WORKS FOR ISSUE #72:

SAND LAND

STEAMWORLD HEIST II

ANOTHER CRAB'S TREASURE

ENDLESS OCEAN: LUMINOUS

PAPER MARIO: THE THOUSAND-YEAR DOOR

LUIGI'S MANSION 2 HD

DRAGON QUEST MONSTERS: THE DARK PRINCE

RETRO GAME CHALLENGE: 1+2 REPLAY

TEENAGE MUTANT NINJA TURTLES: SPLINTERED FATE

TEENAGE MUTANT NINJA TURTLES ARCADE: WRATH OF THE MUTANTS

LITTLE KITTY, BIG CITY

EUROPA

YARS RISING

AND MUCH MORE!

JULY/ AUGUST 2024

MEET ME ON LONG ISLAND

ALL OF THIS talk about water and swimming and ocean exploration . . . that's it. I'm going to an island!

Do people who live on Long Island really think about the islandness of their home all that often? Does Long Island have a genuine island vibe? I don't know! I've never been! But I plan to remedy that shortly.

I've been invited to be one of the Special Guests at this year's Long Island Retro Gaming Expo. It's taking place in Garden City, New York from August 9th to 11th this year, and it's going to be held in the Cradle of Aviation museum on Charles Lindbergh Boulevard. Tickets are on sale now!

The Long Island Retro Gaming Expo is a huge video game convention, full of exhibits celebrating the history of our favorite hobby. It has an Arcade Age exhibit featuring restorations of historically significant arcade cabinets, going all the way back to machines like the original Pong. There's a Gaming Console Timeline, where you can go hands-on with home systems dating back over 50 years. There's an Indie Game Zone, a Retro Gaming Museum full of rare, obscure curiosities, a dedicated area set aside for superfans of the Pokémon series — and, on top of all that, the venue itself is worth checking out entirely on its own, since it's filled with vintage airplanes and you can learn the whole history of man taking to the skies.

I'm going to be giving a presentation on The Impact of Iwata, answering questions and going into a bit more depth and detail on a few topics that didn't quite make the cut for the final book. I'll also have a vendor table set up for you to stop by and grab a copy if you haven't done so already, and maybe give any in-person attendees the inside scoop on NF's next publishing plans. And, bonus, my family will be attending with me — so you can all feel free to ask Carter to autograph his latest Carter's Corner, challenge Calvin to a Pokémon battle or watch me breathlessly chase after Cooper, Colson and Chance when they get dangerously close to knocking over something expensive. Come join us! It'll be a good time! **— LUCAS**

Long Island Retro Gaming Expo: liretro.com/tickets

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